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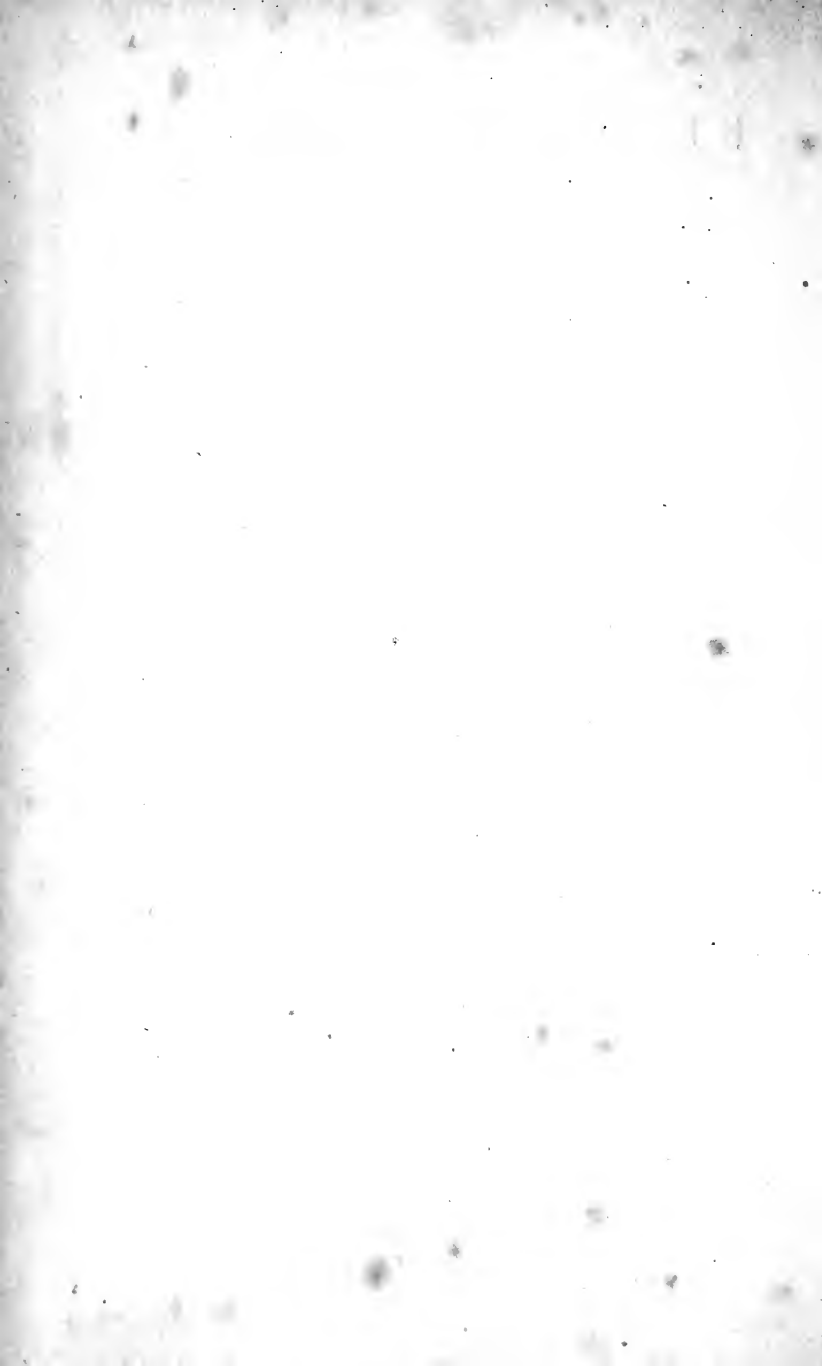
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BENTLEY PRIORY.

BY

MRS. HASTINGS PARKER.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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BENTLEY PRIORY.

CHAPTER I.

IT were vain to attempt a description of the mingled sorrow and consternation with which Sir William Wrexham read the hurried, almost hopeless letter in which his wife made known to him the unexpected blow that had converted the house of joy into one of lamentation; and at the same time implored that he would, without a moment's delay, hurry to Bentley, accom-

panied by Dr. Dereham, on whose superior skill and long acquaintance with the constitution of the sufferer, hung the last forlorn hope in which any now permitted themselves to indulge. Sir William had loved Emily Morton as though she had been a child of his own. For the last three months, he had watched with affectionate anxiety the successive struggles to which her heart had been subjected, and had observed with pain that her physical strength was wholly unequal to the effort required to subdue them; plunged as she was, at the same time, through the foolish and frivolous vanity of her mother, in a ceaseless round of dissipation, which left her not a moment for repose, either of mind or body. But latterly, Sir William had fancied that a change for the better had been perceptible.

Emily's cheek had become paler, and her eye less bright. There was a smile of genuine pleasure on her countenance whenever Lord Errington addressed her. It was probable that if things were permitted to go smoothly on in their present channel, she would end, and that ere very long, in finding herself a beloved and happy wife. And this bright fabric which Sir William had delighted in picturing to himself as on the very eve of completion, was in a moment dashed to the earth by the sad and unexpected intelligence that had just reached him.

After giving directions that his travelling carriage, with four post horses, should follow him with the least possible delay to Dr. Dereham's house, Sir William hurried on foot to Brook Street, that not moment

might be lost in prosecuting the journey to Bentley.

Ample time there was, however, for the painful reflections which came crowding on his mind, as he paced up and down the apartment with a step very different from the calm measured tread which was habitual to him. Lady Wrexham's letter had been so hurried and incoherent that Sir William was unable to form any conjecture either as to the nature of Emily's illness, or the real magnitude of the danger, which, however, he scarcely dared permit himself to hope had been exaggerated. The only definite idea which presented itself to his mind was that, whatever the sickness by which she had been attacked, its virulence would be incalculably aggravated by the prostration of strength incidental to all the concurring

circumstances of the last many weeks. He knew that a season in London was, as Aunt Dorothy had justly remarked, very trying (alas! in the present case it had been peculiarly so), for how many a saddened heart, as well as faded cheek and wasted form, is all that remains to the poor victim of dissipation, when "The Season," to which she had looked forward with such unmingled pleasure, is over.

"And such has been the fate of that once bright, and beautiful, and gifted creature, sacrificed—and for what?" was Sir William's reflection, as he seated himself in the *fauteuil* by Dr. Dereham's well-strewed table; and on most points of the picture which presented itself to his imagination, Sir William's judgment was perfectly correct. Emily Morton's health,

well-being, and peace of mind *had* been in a great measure sacrificed to the overweening pride and folly of her mother, though Mrs. Morton, to do her justice, was unconscious of the injury of which she had made herself the instrument. Like most frivolous women of the world, she had acquired a taint of selfishness, by which every action, even towards those most dear to her, was insensibly influenced. She had laboured through the ceaseless tumult of amusement; she had striven for introductions and manœuvred for invitations, believing all the time that it was Emily's advantage and Emily's gratification that prompted her exertions. How she had deceived herself! Had the worldly woman loved pleasure less, the mother would have been enabled to reason more truly. But

when did a votary of pleasure ever sit down to reason dispassionately on aught that militated against his or her gratification?

These were the reflections that passed rapidly and painfully through Sir William Wrexham's mind, as he sat earnestly watching every sound; but time wore on, and it was not till towards three o'clock that Dr. Dereham's return enabled them to set forward on their journey to Bentley. Mandeville, meanwhile, after making his escape from Albemarle Street, had hurried anxiously to every house where he thought it possible that any information of Emily's state might have been received, but all his inquiries proved fruitless.

Mrs. Thornham and Blanche did the same, but with no better success, and they returned from their drive, the one with sad-

der, the other with graver feelings than either had experienced for many a long day. The hours had never appeared so long—the street had never looked so deserted. Even the usually comfortable inhabited-looking room seemed to have acquired a sudden air of desolation. Blanche seated herself in the window, with the last new novel in her hand, but even the well-told tale seemed to have lost its interest, for the book lay on her lap, while her eyes wandered listlessly over the street below. A solitary carriage was standing at the hotel opposite, while a waiter, in the idleness of a London August day, was seated on a bench in the doorway, drowsily poring over the newspaper which he held in his hand. At the area gate, next door, a sandy-headed boy, in the act of stringing one

more pewter beer-can on the already well-laden leather thong which hung over his shoulder, was merrily whistling the tune of "The Highland Laddie." How discordant it sounded in Blanche's ears ! Except a tradesman with a portentous looking blue bag, and a nursery-maid with two children, no other creature was visible, till an itinerant musician, bending beneath the weight of an organ, laboured slowly up the street, looking up, right and left, at the generally deserted windows to catch any eye that might afford a chance of favour. On perceiving Blanche, he stopped, and planting his organ immediately beneath the window, with his eyes upraised to her, began grinding away with all his might. Oh, the unimaginable agony that may be awakened by the notes of an old familiar air thus breaking on the ear !

Blanche rose hastily, and passed into the next room, but the sound still followed her, for the poor minstrel had his guerdon to gain, and he played resolutely on, repeating each air twice, and then only ceasing a minute to change to another, till his whole stock was exhausted. Finding, however, that all his efforts to attract attention were ineffectual, he at last passed on ; and Blanche, after one or two wanderings about the room, taking up her book and laying it down again, then raising the fractured marble, and examining the amount of damage, with half-a-dozen nothings of the same sort, resumed her seat in the window.

Mrs. Thornham had opened her writing-desk to complete the letters which had been left unfinished, and these were now directed and sealed ; yet half an hour was still

Blanche's manner, while the absent answer, wanting to dinner, and it was a relief to both when it was announced. The meal was soon despatched, and mother and daughter seated themselves together, but neither seemed much disposed for conversation, for both were weighed down by an oppression they found it impossible to shake off. Blanche was evidently depressed, though less so than two hours previously, for the time was approaching for Mandeville's evening visit; and let her private thoughts be what they might, the charm of his presence was never without its effect. Mrs. Thornham was grave and thoughtful, for the melancholy news of the morning had awakened more than all her usual maternal solicitude. She observed with pain the restless uneasiness of

the suppressed sigh, the ineffectual attempt at cheerfulness, were, to her watchful eye, tokens of a heart ill at ease, not to be mistaken. She had not been present at the first announcement, which had caused so startling a change in Mandeville's manner, or the mist would no doubt have been at once dispelled from her eyes. She had been somewhat puzzled to account for his delay in bringing matters to a conclusion, but whatever his motives, she felt that Lady Wrexham was right. Where Blanche's happiness was concerned, it behoved her to act with decision, if he were not inclined to do so. Mandeville was to quit London on the following day, and in the short interim that remained, Mrs. Thornham secretly resolved that all uncertainty and indecision should be ended.

CHAPTER II.

“THIS is very, very sad, mavourneen,” said Mrs. Thornham, tenderly, to Blanche, as they sat together, watching the twilight which was fast deepening into the shades of evening.

“Sad — yes — for them ; but not for her.”

“And why not, my child ? ”

“I have been thinking all day, mamma

mia, that it is those who are left, not those who are taken, that are to be pitied."

"True, darling—very often. But she was so young, and so happy."

Blanche made no reply. A few minutes after the lamp was brought, and then the tea-things were put on the table, and after standing for a quarter of an hour beyond their usual time, the urn was brought in, and the process of tea-making gone through, still Mandeville had not made his appearance, Neither Mrs. Thornham nor Blanche appeared to notice his absence, but both were unusually silent and thoughtful. At length, when the meal was nearly ended, a note of apology was put into Mrs. Thornham's hand, informing her that he had been unsuccessful in gleaning any further intelligence, and containing a promise to call

the following morning, when the Grenville's were expected to arrive from Bentley. She thrust it into her reticule, for Blanche had at the moment left the room, merely telling her, on her return, that Mr. Mandeville had sent an excuse for his absence, but without mentioning the promised visit for the following day.

Poor Blanche! As she laid her head on her pillow that night, it was with a heavier heart than in her whole life she had ever felt before. But, whatever the sadness of her feelings, it was at least unmingled with self-reproach, that most bitter drop in the act of retribution. Could Emily, amid the wild wanderings of a fevered brain, or Blanche, in the bewildered imaginings which a few hours had sufficed to conjure up, or any of those on whom Mandeville had only

too fatally exercised his powers of fascination, have witnessed his suffering throughout that one night, they must have felt that the hour of retribution was at length fully come. He had endeavoured to nerve himself to join Mrs. Thornham's tea-table as usual, but in vain. Uncertain as to Emily's fate, filled with remorse at the remembrance of every torturing word, and every unkind thought he had ever entertained towards her, he felt that he had never loved her so passionately as now. But what availed regret and self-reproach when both had come too late? Oh, that the unkind word—the heedless taunt—the thoughtless act were oftener checked while there is yet time! Oh, the bitter memories—the heart-wringing regrets—the unavailing wishes to recall the past, when the grave has closed over

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one whom, even while loving most dearly, we have pained most deeply—when the heart we have wrung has ceased to beat, and the eye we have made to weep is closed to us for ever!

Mandeville passed an almost sleepless night; and the next morning, fearful of trusting himself with the inquiry, he sent to Mr. Grenville's house at the hour he had been told the family were expected. They had not yet arrived; but at eleven o'clock he sent again, and received the following few hurried lines in return:—

“Miss Morton had fallen into a deep sleep, which Dr. T. was extremely anxious should continue; but she had begun to be a little restless again, when he left Bentley. Dr. Dereham had not arrived. We shall hear again to-night.”

“ While there is life, there is hope,” thought Mandeville, as he seized his hat, and took his way to Albemarle Street.

He found Mrs. Thornham alone ; for the day was lovely, and she had proposed an early shopping expedition to her daughter, to which Blanche, imagining that the promised visit would be paid at the usual hour, had unsuspectingly assented. Mandeville looked pale and haggard, but his manner was unchanged, and as he seated himself by Mrs. Thornham, replying to her inquiries regarding Emily, sharing her expressions of anxiety and regret, and echoing the hopes which Mrs. Grenville’s note faintly held out, it must have been a practised observer, indeed, who could have discovered any traces of the intense mental suffering to which he had been a prey.

“Then we may hear again to-night?”
said Mrs. Thornham.

“Mrs. Grenville expects a letter at eight o'clock.”

“And at what hour do you go?”

“The packet sails at eleven,” said Mandeville, whose purpose of departure had been sadly shaken by the intelligence of the day before, and who felt it would be little short of torture to leave England under existing circumstances.

“Is Miss Thornham out?” inquired he, for the first time appearing to notice Blanche’s absence.

“She went out half an hour ago. To say the truth,” pursued Mrs. Thornham, after a moment’s pause, “I rather wished that your visit this morning should be to myself alone, for I have been anxious for some

little time past to speak to you on a subject which I could not discuss in her presence. I can scarcely doubt that you guess to what I refer."

Mandeville seemed to reflect a moment, then, looking up inquiringly—

"If there is anything in the world in which I can be useful, my dear Mrs. Thornham, I shall only be too happy," said he, at last, with a faint attempt at one of his own bland smiles.

There was an awkward pause. His manner was so earnest, yet so evidently unconscious of the impending discussion, that Mrs. Thornham felt embarrassed how to proceed. The truth was that his perceptions really were a little blunted by the circumstances of the moment, which had so entirely absorbed every thought. She

felt there was nothing for it but to come to the point at once.

“You must, I think, be aware, Mr. Mandeville,” she proceeded, “that your attentions towards Blanche for some time past have been such as to attract general observation.”

Could Mrs. Thornham only have imagined the torture she was inflicting! Mandeville writhed beneath it. To be compelled to rebut, to defend, to extricate himself from a dilemma like this, at a moment when every thought was so painfully and so entirely pre-occupied!

“Really, my dear Mrs. Thornham,” said he, in a tone of bitterness perceptible in his usually melodious voice, “I cannot remember anything that should seem to call for particular notice from anyone; neither,

to confess the truth, could I have imagined that you, any more than myself, would have attached the slightest importance to such idle gossip. Surely you cannot mean that in cultivating an intimacy for which I should have thought our long friendship would have afforded an ample pretext, I can have done anything to incur your, or your sweet daughter's, displeasure."

Again Mrs. Thornham paused. Mandeville seemed resolved not to understand the drift of her observations. She foresaw that no pleasant task was before her.

"Am I then to insult your good feeling," said she, at last, "by supposing that you have sought only your own amusement in all that has passed?"

"All? Excuse me, may I ask to what you allude?"

“I acknowledge you surprise me,” answered Mrs. Thornham, with some dignity, while a great many mingled feelings of affectionate regret for Blanche, of contempt for him, and of self-gratulation that she had had the courage to bring matters to an understanding before it was too late, passed rapidly through her mind.

“That I admire Miss Thornham above all others, I need scarcely tell you,” said Mandeville, extenuatingly. “Who that sees her can help admiring her? But, believe me, I never for a moment dreamed that anything in my conduct towards her could have been so entirely misconstrued. Forgive me for reminding you how repeatedly, both in your presence and hers, I have declared that, whatever my wishes, it was totally out of my power to marry.”

“Forgive *me* for saying it was a pity you did not act as if you really meant so. Blanche is very young, and you are too much a man of the world not to know that you were cruelly risking her happiness.” She paused a moment for an answer, but none came.

“When I look back,” she added at last, “I can only wonder at my own want of prudence and discernment.”

The frame of mind in which Mandeville listened to Mrs. Thornham was certainly anything but enviable. He had never been so taken to task before, and his self-love was doubly chafed at the quarter from whence the lesson came. Had she been a duchess, it would have been bad enough; but to be catechized, called to account, re-proved by a Mrs. Thornham! It was a

humiliation, the possibility of which could never have entered his imagination. And then the moment she had chosen, when his mind was distracted by anxiety, harassed by regrets, and so completely absorbed by one subject as to render every other infinitely irritating and unwelcome.

“I can only repeat my deep regret that you should so entirely have misinterpreted me,” said he, in as calm a tone as he could command, and anxious to bring the conference to an end as rapidly as possible.

“I have indeed done so,” replied Mrs. Thornham, coldly. “However, let the subject end here, for it cannot be a pleasant one to either of us. I have only myself to blame for allowing my judgment to be so entirely at fault.”

There was an awkward pause again. For

a man so proud as Mandeville, it was no enviable position. Every nerve seemed swelling with the indignity offered to him, and yet—a rupture with the Thornhams—to what might not the world attribute it? The thought was torture.

“Allow me once more to assure you,” said he, in a tone of the most freezing politeness, “that it is a source of the deepest regret that I should have been so entirely misinterpreted. You will, however, permit me to hope that we part friends, and that as such we may one day meet again”—and he rose as he spoke.

“We shall be happy to see you, if you return to England some time hence,” replied Mrs. Thornham, in the same cold, dignified manner as before. “At present, should any chance prolong your stay, you

will excuse me for saying I must beg to decline your visits."

"Had I sooner been made aware that they were unwelcome, I should have discontinued them long ago—of course I shall intrude no more;" and with a bow, stately enough for royalty itself, Mandeville mechanically took his hat, and the next moment had descended the stair, and was passing along Albemarle Street.

It was a pleasant termination to his intimacy with the Thornhams. He had been actually forbidden the house.

Occupied with his own thoughts, Mandeville crossed Bond Street, and was in the act of turning into Hanover Square, when Blanche suddenly crossed his path. To pass her without speaking was impossible, even had he felt so disposed, which was not the case,

for, all chafed as he was, there was something in the bright smile and the deep flash with which she met him that was irresistibly attractive.

“Have you heard from Bentley to-day?” was Blanche’s first question.

“Yes—there are some hopes.”

“Then I may tell mamma she is better?”

“I have already seen Mrs. Thornham.”

“I did not know you meant to call so early,” said Blanche, in a tone of disappointment she could not conceal.

“I knew you would be anxious for early intelligence, and my time later will be much occupied.”

“We shall see you this evening then.”

“I fear it will be out of my power; I believe I must bid you farewell now.”

Blanche’s bright eye flashed with more

than its usual brilliancy as she replied gaily :—

“A rivederla, then.” She held out her hand. It was seized with the usual warm pressure, and the next moment Mandeville was gone.

Blanche drew down her veil and quickened her steps towards home, for there was a painful struggle in her heart, and she found some difficulty in repressing the tears that had rushed unbidden to her eyes. But she dashed them away, and, slackening her pace as she passed into Albemarle Street, had succeeded in regaining her composure ere she entered the drawing-room at Crawley’s.

“I met Mr. Mandeville, and he told me he had been here,” said Blanche, resolutely, to her mother, who with some anxiety had been awaiting her return.

“Did you, dear? Then he told you the news from Bentley?”

“Yes; but no particulars. I only saw him for a minute”—and Mandeville’s name was not alluded to again.

The tone and manner of each — how well mother and daughter understood each other!

“I have been thinking while you were out, mavourneen,” said Mrs. Thornham, with more than her usual tenderness of manner, “that this sad business will of course make a change in Lady Wrexham’s plans. She cannot go to Rock Castle as she intended; therefore there is no use in our waiting here to join her; we will go to Brighton instead.”

Blanche had no objection to make; all places on the face of the earth were to her at that moment equally indifferent.

“Anywhere with you, mamma mia,” exclaimed she, flinging her arms round her mother’s neck. When had the treasure of a mother’s love—its untiring affection, its devoted tenderness—seemed so prized or so precious as then?

Mrs. Thornham took care that the remainder of that day should be occupied in preparations for departure; and so well did she arrange matters, that the following morning beheld herself and Blanche on their road to Brighton, where she trusted that the influence of time and of new and cheerful scenes, together with the conviction of the heartless coquetry of which Man-deville’s own conduct had furnished the proof, would ere long entirely obliterate the impression which his fascination could scarcely have failed to produce.

CHAPTER III.

AMONG the various transitions from bitter to sweet, and sweet to bitter, of which human life is made up, there are few more startling or painful than that which in one moment converts the house of rejoicing into one of sorrow; and doubly so is it when the voice of lamentation is heard for one who but a moment before was with us in all the pride and beauty and joyousness of youth, ere the eye, dimmed

by tears, or the heart, seared by affliction, has learned to regard its passage hence but as a journey to that better land where sin and sorrow can enter no more. When the aged or the infirm are taken from us, the lesson is less startling, for it would seem that Death had but claimed his own. But what affinity can we, in our erring vision, trace between the spring of life and the dark valley of the shadow of death? The already seared and withered leaf falls, and we bend beneath the conviction that it will be replaced by the freshness and verdure of others; but the spring flower, beaten down in all its beauty by the tempest, seems to call forth our pity as well as our regret. We forget how many a dark cloud must dim life's fairest scenes—from how many a storm that fair and fragile thing may, in

mercy, have been rescued. The death of the young!—oh, who that has tasted of life's dark chalice would lament it? Who, if they could, would recall to a world of sin and sorrow the spirit that hath passed into that calm haven where alone "the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest?"

But at the moment of threatened bereavement, who remembers aught but the awful and sudden blow which seems about to rob him of one, never perhaps so loved and prized as now? And thus it was at Bentley. The very decorations which were to have graced the wedding-feast were all prepared; the flowers which were to strew the bridal path were still blooming, while she for whom so many bright hopes and aspirations were on the very

threshold of fulfilment had been in an instant stricken down, and lay stretched on the bed of suffering, perhaps of death. Silence reigned in the deserted mansion, where, but a few hours before, all had been joy and festivity, for, with the exception of Lady Wrexham, who could not be induced by any persuasion to flee from the danger, and Lord Errington, whose intense anxiety would not permit of his absenting himself, all the guests had taken flight. Aunt Dorothy, with Gertrude and the children, had been at once removed to London, out of the reach of infection; and even the servants, those excepted whose duties were required in the sick-chamber, were directed as much as possible to avoid all contact, by confining themselves to their own apartments.

Who that has never tended the sick couch of one most dear can tell the misery of those long days and nights of weary watching, when the worn-out frame and the sinking heart pine for, yet dare not snatch an instant of repose, while the spirit, hovering between life and death, renders each moment, with its clinging hopes or dark fears, an age of concentrated agony. For many a day and night sleep scarcely visited the eyelids of many a weary watcher at Bentley. Dr. Dereham, who arrived on the second evening of Emily's illness, and whose interest in the sufferer was almost as great as though she had been a child of his own, in great part shared their vigil, thus giving proof at the same time of his kindly feeling and his deep anxiety as to the result. During the whole of that period, both Mrs.

Morton and Lady Wrexham scarcely quitted the sick chamber ; the latter, regardless of all personal danger, like a ministering angel, anticipating every wish, sharing every fatigue, and breathing words of comfort to all. Towards the close of the sixth day, exhaustion succeeded to fear, and Emily fell at last into a deep sleep.

It was night, and not a sound louder than the stealthy step or suppressed whisper of the watchers was permitted to disturb the absolute stillness of that vast mansion, when, after persuading Mrs. Morton to lie down for half an hour in an adjoining chamber, Lady Wrexham, with untiring affection, took her post near Emily's pillow. Hour after hour, that death-like slumber lasted, till, towards the grey dawn of morning, Lady Wrexham's acute ear caught

the sound of a deep-drawn breath, and the next moment she drew the curtain gently aside, as Emily unclosed her eyes, once more in recovered consciousness.

“Thank God,” mentally ejaculated Lady Wrexham, as she stood a moment, fearful lest the slightest movement should scare away the spirit of peace, which seemed once more descending on the sick couch.

“Oh, Caroline, I have had such frightful dreams.”

“You have been ill, dearest, but you are better now, thank God,” whispered Lady Wrexham, affectionately pressing the still fevered hand which lay on the coverlet; and as Emily raised her eyes, and recognised the sweet face that was bending over her, while recollection gradually stole over her wandering senses, Lady Wrexham glided away

for the composing draught which was to refresh her parched lips.

“You will sleep again, dear, I hope,” whispered Caroline, as she smoothed the pillow, and in a few minutes Lady Wrexham, with noiseless step, had passed into the adjoining chamber, to whisper a few words of comfort to Mrs. Morton, and from thence to the library, where Lord Errington was holding his solitary vigil.

From the moment that the violence of Emily's disorder abated, all was hope and joy at Bentley—such hope and joy as those only can imagine who feel that their cares are at length rewarded—that the hand of the destroying angel has been arrested by that of the angel of mercy, and that they may lie down and rest in peace.

And who that had seen Lord Errington

then, as, with the tenderest solicitude, he watched the returning hues of health stealing over Emily's pale cheek, as he supported her tottering steps, or anticipated every wish with more than a woman's tenderness—who could have recognized the being that, but a few short months before, had been pronounced so utterly unimpassioned and apathetic as to have driven to despair half the lady-mothers in London. Who of all those who had so unremittingly, though vainly, put forth all their powers of attraction, and had at last ended by deciding that a heart so cold, and a mind so inaccessible, must needs be all barren from Dan to Beersheba, could have conceived the power of that thrilling voice, when once awakened by love's magic wand, or have imagined the depths of that finely-culti-

vated understanding? Lord Errington's intellect was one of the highest order; and the long years of seclusion in the solitude of Trentham Abbey, to which the morbid selfishness of his father had condemned him, though they could not fit him to shine in the butterfly existence of the great world, were productive of better things, in the rich stores of information laid up, while others were fretting their hour on the world's great stage. He had travelled, too, in far distant lands—had acquired their languages, studied their manners, and made acquaintance with all that was most interesting in them; and now all the powers of Lord Errington's fine intellect seemed unlocked to beguile the tedium of Emily's tardy convalescence. Hour after hour would he sit beside her, either reading in

that deep manly voice which lent increased beauty and interest even to the lightest subject, or relating some of the many tales of travel with which his memory was stored. Now it was the description of some gorgeous Roman festival—now a Moorish tale, gathered during his wanderings in Spain, or a festive scene on the shores of the blue Mediterranean—an encounter with the brigands of Greece, or an adventure on the burning sands of Egypt.

Those were tranquil, happy days to Emily—the happiest she had ever known. Even the bright days of her childhood, all unclouded as they were, were not like these. She had learned the bitter lesson that life, at best, is but an April day—now smiles, now tears; but the sunshine of the

present seemed only the more beautiful for the showers that had gone before, even as the deep rich colouring of the "sweet south" is gazed on with tenfold delight and admiration after the sterner features of northern climes. Emily, in fact, had been taught to think more deeply than she had ever done before. The finger of death had been pointed at her—at *her*, the young, the beautiful, the gifted, the admired, and hers was not a mind over which the warning would pass unheeded. She felt deeply, gratefully, that she had been mercifully rescued almost from the brink of the grave. And Lord Errington felt it too, and it seemed, in the intensity of the feelings that had been thus called forth, that a new and still more enduring link had sprung up between them.

No recurrence had ever been made to the only subject on which, as Emily had herself acknowledged, she had any reservation from Lord Errington. It might have been that, in the all-engrossing thoughts connected with the danger and restoration of her he loved, all recollection of the conversation that had passed between them had been effaced. It might have been that, with the confidence natural to a mind itself all truth, he had ceased to attach any importance to the suspicions that had once vaguely floated through it. Be that as it may, Lord Errington scrupulously avoided every topic of an exciting nature, while in the unmixed enjoyment of the present every doubt or fear either was or seemed to be forgotten.

But even in the midst of this apparent

tranquillity a canker was still lurking. Emily was now able to leave the house, and to breathe the fresh air of heaven; but those by whom she was so tenderly watched observed with pain that no progressive amendment appeared to reward their care. A violent affection of the throat, very common in the malady by which she had been attacked, had been succeeded by a short, hacking cough, aggravated by a cold caught in the first days of convalescence; and though Dr. Dereham had from time to time come down from London to visit his patient—though every injunction had been rigidly adhered to, and every precaution observed — still the step was as feeble, the hand as fevered, the cough as obstinate as ever.

“Surely something ought to be done,

my dear Dr. Dereham," said Lady Wrexham, who, with her husband, was still at Bentley. "She seems to me to lose ground daily, and my poor aunt is quite wretched."

"Something must be done," replied the doctor, gravely; "and I am truly glad you are here, for what I would propose will come better from you than from me. Change of air will sometimes do more than medicine, but there must be no half measures. She must be taken to a warmer climate, and that immediately."

Lady Wrexham's heart sank within her. How many a fair flower had she seen condemned to that long, weary journey, only to die in the land of the stranger, and be left where no friendly eye could ever shed a tear on the far-off resting-place of the deserted one!

“I have considered the case in all its bearings,” pursued Dr. Dereham; “there must be no delay. The journey, at best, is a tedious one, and she must not be fatigued or hurried.”

With a sigh Lady Wrexham undertook the task of making known Dr. Dereham’s opinion, and of hastening as much as possible the preparations for departure, for it was now the beginning of September; but it required all her tact and ingenuity to break the unexpected communication in such a manner as not needlessly to alarm Mrs. Morton, still less the invalid herself. Lord Errington, too, was to be informed of the new and unexpected impediment to his happiness, but here Lady Wrexham found the difficulties of her task incalculably lessened. He listened to the announcement

with infinite anxiety, indeed, but still with sanguine hope for the result, and at once signified his wish to accompany the little party. And so it was arranged : Aunt Dorothy was to remain in London, in charge of the children, with Gertrude for a companion ; while it needed small persuasion on the part of Lady Wrexham to induce her kind husband, on such an occasion, to turn his steps for this year towards the “sweet south,” instead of to Rock Castle. So rapidly were the preparations completed, that, ere ten days had elapsed, the whole of the Morton party, with the exception of Lord Errington, who was to join them at Rome, were, by easy stages, wending their way to Naples.

CHAPTER IV.

NEARLY three months had passed, and, during that short space of time, divers had been the changes, both of feeling and position, which it had sufficed to create in many of the actors in our tale. The Grenvilles had established themselves for the winter at Brighton, and had succeeded, without difficulty, in persuading Mrs. Thornham to join their coterie, an arrangement which

turned out to be equally agreeable and advantageous to all parties. One there was, indeed, whose fascinations no longer graced the little circle, of which, by more than one, he had been regarded as the most attractive member; but, notwithstanding the charm his society never failed to impart, it may fairly be questioned whether, on the score of enjoyment, the absence of one so dangerously delightful should not have been accounted rather as a gain than a loss. Certain it is that Laura Grenville was able to enter with infinitely more zest into the amusements of Brighton, than she had done into those of the preceding season in London, where a single quadrille, or a valse, with its subsequent promenade, together with as many soft nothings as could be appropriately compressed into the short space of

time allowed for its duration, was but a poor compensation for the sad havoc that the handsome face, and the rich melodious voice, and those same soft nothings sufficed to make in the enjoyment of the rest of the evening. All this battery of small shot was now happily removed, leaving to time, absence, and common sense the curing of any wounds that it might have inflicted. Moreover, Laura had a shrewd suspicion that Man-deville had proposed to, and been refused by, Blanche Thornham, for in the innocence of her heart she found it impossible, after all the manifestations she had so often witnessed, in any other way to account for his abrupt departure, or for Blanche's total silence on the subject. Such a finale to his flirtation with the beautiful heiress was indeed an evidence of bad taste on his part almost beyond

belief; but, at all events, the whole affair proved that Mandeville had never bestowed a thought upon herself, though she had wasted a great many on him, and thus, armed with that talisman, which, however latent, is very rarely absent from woman's heart, she made up her mind that the best thing she could do was to think no more about him—a task infinitely easier now that he was absent, than had the sun of his presence been still near her.

And Blanche—on her first arrival at Brighton, though the scene was as new as it was cheerful, and though that gayest of watering-places was looking its very best, lighted up with the brilliant beams of an autumn sun, and enlivened by the presence of half the gay denizens of the London world, yet to her present distorted vision

all seemed equally flat, stale, and unprofitable. Mandeville's name, however, had never passed her lips, nor, except to a mother's observant eye, was any outward demonstration visible of that which was passing within. None that had seen the bright, flashing eye, or had listened to the silvery, joyous laugh, could have dreamed of the sadness those false tokens of happiness were intended to conceal. But Blanche was not one to permit her regard long to waste itself on an ungrateful soil. She could have loved—nay, she had loved with all the intensity of which her nature was capable, but her pride of heart rebelled against being in return made the mere toy of an idle hour ; and with the indignant impetuosity of her country, she resolved to tear from her heart every remnant of an affection so selfishly

sought and so wantonly slighted. The result was precisely as Mrs. Thornham's prudent foresight had prognosticated. Though the struggle cost Blanche many more bitter moments than she would willingly have acknowledged even to her own heart, yet each day rendered the task easier, for the barrier of confidence and good opinion was broken down, and woe to the stronghold of affection, when robbed of the only safe and solid basis which can ensure its permanence! Regret gave place to contempt, and contempt gradually changed into indifference, till at last Blanche, to her own infinite astonishment, and Mrs. Thornham's no small satisfaction, began to discover that, if other voices were less sweet, and their phrases less honeyed, they had, at least, the much more valuable quality of sincerity to recommend them.

“Do you think you can reconcile yourself to Charlton’s absence from our pic-nic to day, Emmy?” said Charles Grenville to his sister, as he sauntered into the drawing-room in Brunswick Terrace, on a morning in October, so light, balmy, and beautiful as to promise nothing but enjoyment for the party that had been arranged.

“Perfectly, Charles. But what has made him faithless to us, to-day, at the last moment?”

“Faithless? He is anything but that, for his heart—that is if he ever was troubled with such a useless commodity—will certainly be with us. Bodily, he is off for Scotland.”

“Why, it was only last night he told me he should stay the whole winter.”

“A night’s reflection sometimes works

wonderful changes, sister mine. He has probably had dreams of grouse and heather, too powerful to be resisted."

"My dear Charles, I wish you would speak plain English. It is really very hard that you will not let me enjoy the joke, whatever it is, as much as you seem to do yourself," said Emmy, laughing, as she observed the merry twinkle lurking in the corner of her brother's eye.

"Without all these circumbendibusses. Why, what were you thinking of, last night, all through that last valse with Colonel Beaumont, that Charlton's proceedings were so entirely lost upon you—eh—Emmy?"

"Not of him, certainly," said Emmy Grenville, blushing like a rose.

"Beg pardon, Emmy—didn't mean to distress you, though that blush *was* very

becoming. But really you must have been sadly distraught not to have observed poor Charlton. Poor fellow! His face would have melted a heart of stone."

"Why, what on earth happened to him?"

"Happened? Why, some mischievous imp tempted him to propose to Blanche Thornham—and he was refused."

"Oh, is that all?"

"Is that all!"

"Yes; is that all? Only what I expected. I know that you would think it something very dreadful to be refused by Blanche Thornham, as you have the assurance to call her, Charles," said Emmy, with a look of quiet fun; "but for Sir Geoffry Charlton I have really no pity to spare."

“Emmy, I thought better of you ! Have you no pity for a poor devil whose creditors start up as his credit goes down ? Why, it was neck or nothing with him.”

“None in the world. However, you seem to have some influence with Miss Thornham. Why did you not try to excite her compassion ? I daresay it is not too late yet.”

“Past recal, sister mine, and I hate meddling in other people’s concerns ; besides which, poor Charlton has no doubt, by this time, either hung or drowned himself.”

“Well, I think we may all be exceedingly obliged to Miss Thornham. It was a different thing with Mr. Mandeville, who was really a loss to us all.”

“Do you really think Blanche refused him ?”

“Blanche again—what impudence! Well, I really do—”

“Humph,” said Charles Grenville, and he fell into a fit of musing, which was only broken by the congregating of the merry party, including the principal object of his thoughts, the *rendezvous* for the pic-nic having been appointed at Mrs. Grenville’s house. That day of unbroken enjoyment was an era in the life of more than one of the party, to which they often afterwards looked back with pleasure.

While all these things were passing at Brighton, Lord Errington was still a prisoner at Trentham Abbey. He had accompanied the Mortons to London, had remained there during the short period of their stay in England, and had finally seen them depart with the consoling expectation

that they should all meet again within a few weeks in the Eternal City. But it seemed as if some evil genius were continually busied in placing a fresh impediment between Lord Errington and the fulfilment of those hopes which had now become dearer to him than ever. The slight illness with which Lord Grantham had been attacked, just before the period appointed for his son's marriage, suddenly assumed a more formidable appearance, and almost at the moment of his intended departure, Lord Errington found himself compelled to lay aside all hope of being able to prosecute his journey for at least many weeks to come.

"This is weary work, Edward," said the old earl, one day, as he reclined in his easy chair, by a blazing fire in the library in St. James's Square, whither the invalid had

been removed, in order to be within more immediate reach of medical aid. It was a dark, dismal day in November, with a yellow fog up to the very windows, so dense that the area railings at the distance of a few feet were undiscernible.

“I daresay you feel the oppression of the atmosphere to-day,” said Lord Errington, laying down a letter which he had received from bright, sunny Naples, with an account of the safe arrival of the travellers, and the happy prospect of Emily’s convalescence. She had borne the long journey better than her previously enfeebled state had given reason to hope.

“This is even worse than Trentham,” said the earl, peevishly, as he glanced at the windows with their heavy yellow covering.

“Here is L.’s last paper in the *Quarterly*,” said Lord Errington, without appearing to notice his father’s observation. “It seems the best he has yet written, I think. Shall I read it to you, or shall we have a hit at backgammon this dark day?”

“No; it is so dark one can see to do nothing,” said the earl. “But I wish you would ring the bell for Saunders to bring my coffee. Those fellows are never thinking of their business. I hate impunctuality.”

Lord Errington did as he was requested, and then stood for a moment, with his arm resting on the mantel-piece, and his eyes fixed on the dingy yellow chaos without. Vision there was none, for his thoughts were far away; and imagination, with a fairy wand, had conjured up fair scenes, and one

bright form amongst them, which for an instant shut out all external objects from his perceptions. The opening of the door, and the querulous tones of Lord Trentham's voice, brought back reality in painful comparison, and it was almost with a sigh that Lord Errington reseated himself at the table, uncertain whether he should resume the book with which he had been engaged, or make one last effort to chase away the demon of *ennui*, which seemed to have fastened itself on the mind of his father.

People may say what they please, but it is undeniable that our capabilities of enjoyment are more influenced by the effect of climate than by most other things on the face of the earth. I do not mean to say that, where real cause for unhappiness exists, the mere light of the sun will rob the heart

of its load, but unquestionably it lightens in an extraordinary degree the task of endurance. A buoyant atmosphere is the cork-jacket which keeps our heads above water, while the winds and waves are still buffeting around us. We are just as much cast on the wide billows as ever, but we have thrown off the wet blanket which kept us down, well nigh to sinking, and float away whether we will or no. Now, of all the chilling atmospheric influences which ever fell coldly on the human heart, none can compare with a dense yellow November fog in London ; and it was to this that Lord Errington endeavoured to attribute the difficulty he felt in shaking off a sense of depression, very unusual with his even temper and generally cheerful spirits. There was a kind of waking night-mare—a vague fore-

boding of some impending evil, against which he vainly struggled, and which the position wherein he was now placed was, of all others, the least calculated to dispel. To the morbid feelings, and the utter selfishness, engendered during a long life of solitary indulgence, Lord Trentham, who was almost his only companion, now added the querulous fretfulness which, in a mind like his, might be expected to accompany old age and growing infirmities. He had expressed no regret at being the cause of his son's imprisonment in the dismal atmosphere of a sick house. To judge by the peevish tones of his voice, whenever he addressed him, it might indeed rather have been supposed that he was chafed at his presence. It was altogether a sore trial of patience, and so Lord Errington felt it.

“When did you write to my sister?” inquired Lord Trentham of his son.

“On Tuesday. We may receive an answer to-morrow.”

“Ah, I daresay she is too much taken up with the gay doings at Brussels to attend to any request of mine,” observed the earl, at whose desire Lord Errington had written to Lady Emmeline, to announce his wish that she, with her son, would pay him a visit in England. It was a tardy act of brotherly kindness, arising more from selfish motives than from any compunctious recollections of past neglect; but Lord Errington had contrived to infuse so much kindness into the tone of the invitation, and had dwelt so much on the precarious state of Lord Trentham’s health, that he was sanguine as to the result.

“I fancy my aunt has almost entirely given up the gay world,” said Lord Errington, in answer to his father’s observation. “So Mandeville told me.”

“Mandeville—humph! Very foreign, I suppose, with that continental education. I hope, if he comes, he will not be bringing any of his foreign airs here,” said the earl, to whose mind the idea of having invited his relatives for the first time to England, at a season of all others the least enjoyable, never seemed to present itself, any more than the difficulties which had compelled Lady Emmeline to give her son a foreign education, or none at all, all of which, without the smallest personal sacrifice, Lord Trentham might have obviated.

“You will find Mandeville very agreeable, I assure you,” said Lord Errington, as

he thought of the cheerful scenes from which his cousin would be recalled, and then glanced first towards the windows, and then round the vast, sombre library, which, now that Lord Trentham had taken possession of it for his usual sitting-room, was nearly unavailable for any other purpose.

“Agreeable—humph! By the way, he made himself very agreeable at one time to your young lady. At least, so that talkative old woman, Lady Courtney, told me, when she did me the honour of going twenty miles out of her way to inflict that visit on me last autumn.”

Lord Errington made no reply. Idle gossip at all times was utterly thrown away upon him, and more especially when proceeding from such a source; and yet,

whether it was that his mind was predisposed to receive painful impressions, or that the leaden weight of the atmosphere, together with the unforeseen train of late events, had had a depressing influence, certain it is that those few words had sufficed to give a local habitation and a name to a phantom which in the first days of his courtship, had, it may be remembered, vaguely presented itself before him, but which for some time past had been entirely set at rest. From how insignificant a spring the mighty stream of conflicting passions, which is perpetually flowing through the human heart, often takes its source !

CHAPTER V.

WERE it possible to close one's eyes one day in the midst of the murky mist we have just been describing, and to open them the next in the genial warmth and beneath the bright sky of loveliest Naples, it would be difficult to persuade oneself that at the same hour two spots so utterly dissimilar could exist upon the face of the same earth. When we left St. James's

Square, Lord Errington had just fixed his eyes on the only cheerful object within reach—the blazing fire before him ; and one could almost fancy that he was endeavouring to draw therefrom a useful commentary on the various phantoms which had so unwelcomely made good their entrance into the chambers of his imagination.

At the same moment Emily Morton was seated by the open window of an apartment in that most cheerful of all streets, the Riviera di Chiaja, at Naples, gazing forth upon a scene as beautiful as the imagination of the poet ever fancied. Clouds, light as the ether through which they floated, were skimming along a sky of that intense brilliant blue seen only in southern climates, while beneath them, like a lake of azure crystal, reposed the deep blue waters

of the Mediterranean, their placid surface studded with craft of various sizes, from the tiny bark of the fisher to the stately vessel which had ploughed the ocean from many a far-off land.

In the midst of that loveliest bay, as if to form a centre to the picture, rose the Island of Capri; and in the foreground, immediately beneath the windows, the gardens of the Villa Reale, fringing the very shore, now in full fragrance, and affording a promenade nearly a mile in length, stretched far away, right and left, the crescent on one side terminating in the beautiful Strada Nuova, and on the other in the dark blue mountains, with Portici at their base, of which Vesuvius formed the most prominent and interesting feature.

It was one of those days and scenes

when the mere sense of existence is felt to be a luxury. The air was like balm. Not a ripple stirred the waters, and, except when a faint breeze came refreshingly from the sea, all nature seemed to have fallen asleep, like a happy child, with a smile on its fair face.

But if the inanimate world was thus buried in repose, other sights and sounds there were sufficient to awaken the veriest dreamer who would have sought through its sweet influences to lap his senses in Elysium. The Chiaja at Naples, whether it be the broad paved carriage road, or the Villa Reale gardens by which it is flanked, is the favourite resort of the idle of all classes. The joyous animation, so strangely blended with the indolence of Neapolitan existence, was now in full vigour, and divers sounds

of the every-day life of that favoured spot, proceeding variously from the royal carriage, with its cargo of royal children, to the picturesque gaudy carratella—from the lazy *lazzarone* to the exciting and excited Policinello, all alternately obtruded themselves on Emily's attention, as she sat abstractedly gazing forth on the fair scene before her. The improvement in her health had been, as we have before said, much greater than her previous debility, and the long weary journey had given reason to hope; and as she now sat in a kind of dreamy languor, so admirably expressed by the "*dolce far niente*," one hand supporting the fair cheek over which the delicate hues of health were just beginning to steal, few that had seen her last, as the bright denizen of the London

world, but would have acknowledged that never in her most brilliant days had those chiselled features worn so touching and beautiful an expression as now. The fever of excitement which had given to her beauty an almost startling brilliancy was gone, but in its place the deep repose of a happy heart, at peace with itself and all the world, might now be traced in every varying expression of that sweet and placid countenance.

At the present moment, however, it would seem, from a slight expression of uneasiness, that something had occurred to disturb the usually even tenor of Emily's thoughts; and as the point of time was precisely that at which we left Lord Errington struggling against certain unpleasant visions that had risen up before him, it

might have afforded subject of inquiry to the curious in such matters, to trace the hidden link by which the thoughts of two persons at the distance of some thousand miles apart, and without any premeditation, were at the very same moment attracted towards the same subject. As the gigantic oak springs from the tiny acorn, so in the moral world momentous are the changes which often grow out of causes as insignificant. In Lord Errington's case, a few careless words had set the wheels of thought in motion, while with Emily an occurrence, trivial in itself, but involving consequences equally unforeseen and unfortunate, had produced much the same effect.

A short time previously, Mrs. Morton had made the discovery that a small sum

of money had been extracted from her portfolio ; but in the belief that the theft would probably be repeated, and the offender be thus discovered, it had been allowed to pass unnoticed. A fortnight passed away, during which nothing occurred to excite suspicion, when, a few days preceding that of which we have been writing, it was found that a writing-case belonging to Miss Morton, the lock of which was so curious as to baffle any but a very practised thief, had been carried away from the *escritoire* drawer in which it was generally deposited. All further forbearance was of course completely out of the question. The police were privately sent for, and so prompt were they in obeying the summons, that the whole household was completely taken by surprise.

Mademoiselle Célestine tossed her head,

and echoed the declaration of Antonio, the Italian courier, that in all the various families wherein they had respectively held office, no such indignity had ever before been offered to them. Nevertheless, despite the indignation of some, and the consternation of others, a minute search was forthwith commenced, producing, however, no further result than the discovery of a somewhat larger sum of money in Antonio's portmanteau than there seemed any very reasonable mode of accounting for. The circumstance certainly was rather suspicious, and so the divers questionings of the officers of justice, and the inquiring looks of the bystanders, plainly indicated. Antonio's calling was, however, known to be a profitable one, and to a person of his superior qualifications, as Mademoiselle Célestine

sagely averred, it was fair that it should be so. No trace of the missing property was anywhere discoverable ; no plea existed for dismissing Antonio from his post ; and the whole affair remained as much a mystery as ever.

Several more days elapsed without any occurrence which could tend to cast suspicion on anyone. Antonio was more than ever alert in the performance of his duties, and even Mademoiselle Célestine's ill-humour had nearly given way beneath the smiles and soft speeches wherewith the handsome Italian courier testified his gratitude for the interest she had manifested in his behalf, when, early one morning, the whole family was startled by the appearance of a police officer, with the intelligence that Antonio had an hour previously been ap-

prehended and lodged in prison. The lynx-like eyes of justice, already attracted towards his movements, had about an hour before daybreak discovered him entering a house in a distant quarter of Naples, well known to the police as the resort of all the bad characters in the city; and aware that some powerful motive must have induced him to risk a visit to his favourite haunt, under existing circumstances, they had followed stealthily up the narrow stair (for Antonio, in the fancied security of night and darkness, had neglected to secure the door, to which a pass-key had given him entrance), and reached, unperceived, the door of a small room on the third storey, retained for his especial use. A few minutes observation, through a chink in the crazy wall, sufficed to disclose the purport of his visit.

After striking a light, he, with some difficulty, raised a plank in the flooring, which probably his own ingenuity had converted into a hiding-place, and then proceeded to the examination of its contents. There was a tolerably large heap of coins of various countries, but not a single article that could have been identified, with the exception of a green morocco writing-case, exactly answering the description of that which had been stolen. Its contents, which had been probably more easy of concealment, or composed of more readily destructible materials than leather, had apparently either been destroyed, or disposed of in some other manner ; but the case itself, though broken and defaced, was still there, and it was to destroy this only available evidence of his guilt, that Antonio had now ventured to his den.

Already he had piled a few fagots on the hearth, and having opened a formidable looking clasp-knife, was proceeding to the task of dismemberment, which was to render the work of destruction more easy. It was not a pleasant moment, certainly, when the bright weapon was gleaming in as powerful a hand, and the light was shining upon as athletic a figure as can well be imagined, for the display of that prowess necessary to the calling of the *gendarmes*, who were quietly watching all these proceedings without—and so, it must be confessed, they thought. Presently, however, the fagots burned low. Antonio laid down the glittering knife, and, bending forward as he knelt on the ground, applied his breath to the failing embers. At that moment there was a rush, and then a fierce struggle, in which

Antonio's vast strength had more than once nearly proved a match for his three assailants. They were all armed, however, and he was not ; and thus finally, within an hour, they had succeeded in depositing him, bound hand and foot, in safe custody, and had gone on their way to Mr. Morton's dwelling to make known their capture, and take what further steps were necessary for bringing the offender to justice.

Of these, one of the first consisted in the identification of the only property found, which could, in fact, be identified at all ; but here an unexpected difficulty presented itself. Miss Morton herself was the only person sufficiently familiar with the mutilated writing-case to give any available evidence on the subject, and she positively refused to do so. It was in vain that the officers

of justice, who probably were aware that the safety of their lives depended on Antonio being retained a prisoner, urged the necessity of compliance, and hinted at the consequences likely to ensue from resistance of the law ; in vain Mr. Morton, good, easy man, added a few words, intended to be very effectual, on the expediency of submitting to circumstances. The dread of being instrumental in condemning a fellow creature to some unknown amount of punishment and suffering rendered Emily absolutely inflexible, and the matter seemed unpleasantly enough, to have come to a stand-still, when Sir William Wrexham arrived from a short tour he had been making in the island of Sicily. Emily at once applied to him for support in her purposes of mercy, but, to her surprise, she found Sir

William the most hard-hearted of the party. He argued that all appearance of lenity in the present case was wholly misplaced, and represented so clearly that it was a duty to society to secure it in future from the depredations of so evident an offender, that Emily's scruples at length gave way, and she was induced reluctantly to sign the deposition declaring that the writing-case found was hers.

All this had occurred on the day preceding that on which we have described her as indulging in, though she could scarcely have been said to be enjoying, the *dolce far niente* of that sweet clime, for busy thought was at work, like a meddler, doing mischief, intruding himself where he was not wished for, and shutting the door on many a fair scene without, which might have

set his own dark powers at defiance. How long Emily's reverie had lasted, it would be difficult to say, for she had taken no note of time, when it was broken by the cheerful tones of Lady Wrexham's voice beside her.

"Well, carina, was my description of Naples too vivid?" said she, as she stood beside Emily's chair at the open window.

"It is most lovely," said Emily, rousing herself to the full perception of the scene before her. "I could have wished to remain here, instead of going on to Rome, but for this disagreeable finale to our *séjour*."

"I do not see how you could have done otherwise than you did, and really the man deserved no mercy. I suppose he has been carrying on a system of pillage for years."

“Very likely ; but one does not like to be the instrument of punishment to any one ; and besides, I suppose I am very absurd, but there are reasons why the whole thing has annoyed me more than I can tell you.”

“E perchè, carina ?” inquired Lady Wrexham, who perceived that Emily’s annoyance was greater than the occasion seemed to warrant. “Perhaps the unfortunate writing-case, which, I must own, cut a very sorry figure, contained some particularly precious relic, now, I suppose, irrecoverable, or was itself very precious.”

“Not exactly that.”

“I thought you said there had been nothing in it but loose papers and letters.”

“Nothing ; and I should be perfectly satisfied if I knew that the contents had

been really destroyed unread, for they are of no importance whatever to anyone but myself, but I should be sorry they got into strange hands."

"Depend upon it, if they could be of no use to him, Antonio destroyed them."

"Having read them all previously, of course, to ascertain whether they were worth keeping or not."

"Why, carina," said Lady Wrexham, laughing, "I shall begin to fancy that you have been writing sonnets to the man in the moon, and are afraid of making a certain person jealous; or perhaps you are carrying on a correspondence with the Carbonari, in which Antonio may take especial interest."

"No, no—nothing of the kind," interrupted Emily, with a faint smile. "The

truth is, I have for a long time—since I was almost a child, I may say—been in the habit of keeping a kind of record or journal, not only of events, but of the impressions they conveyed. It was a plan recommended by Aunt Dorothy. She used to say it forced one to think and to observe, besides being often a remembrancer, and so a corrector of one's faults. Now, I need not tell you that a volume of confessions, in which all my sins of omission and commission were, to the best of my knowledge, very conscientiously noted, was not exactly what I should have chosen to lay before the public, as bookmakers say."

"Dearest Emily, how needlessly you torment yourself," replied Lady Wrexham, kindly; "there could be no thought of your heart that the whole world might not read."

“If all the world judged as kindly as you, Caroline, I think and believe so too,” said Emily, pressing the hand which had clasped hers; “besides, I could make you understand a great deal that would be utterly incomprehensible to others; and even if you condemned me, you would see how much I had condemned myself, and would be merciful.”

“Which, considering the amount of your peccadillos, would be very magnanimous on my part, my dear self-accusing cousin.”

“Ah, Caroline, how little you know me! Now I daresay that you, in common with everyone else, thought that last season of mine in London the very acme of enjoyment.”

“Perhaps I know you better than you think, carina; I knew throughout that it was painfully the reverse.”

“Then I am *not* such an accomplished hypocrite.”

“You did your part very well, dear ; but it is difficult to deceive the eye of affection. You never deceived me.”

“I believe I was myself the most deceived of any. When I look back, I am perfectly amazed at my own folly and want of discernment. Would that no self-reproach were added to the miseries of that dreadful time”—and she closed her eyes, as if to shut out some intensely painful recollection.

“I am afraid I helped to blindfold you, dear, for I had certainly formed quite a false estimate of the characters of both, and I often bitterly accuse myself of having misled you too.”

“No, no, Caroline, it was all my own

doing—my own folly, or perhaps worse. But to return to this unlucky writing-case. As you seem to have been so much better acquainted with my thoughts than I had imagined, I need not tell you that those four months in London were a new era in my existence, made up of a thousand hopes and fears, and false impressions, which cost me more than I have happily since learned to think they were worth. Well—the pages containing the record of those very days to which I now look back with so much surprise and regret, as well as a certain unfortunate letter to Gertrude, written—but unhappily never sent—are precisely those which I had just been looking over, and had locked up in my writing-case, intending to destroy them the very night before the robbery.”

Lady Wrexham was silent for a minute.

“Rely on it, Antonio destroyed them,” said she, at last; “but even if he did not—”

At that moment Célestine entered the room to make some trivial inquiry concerning her young lady’s toilet, and having received the required answer, passed on into the sleeping-room beyond.

“I wonder you can tolerate that woman’s insolence, Emily,” said Lady Wrexham, as the *femme de chambre* closed the door. “There is something in her look and manner that would to me be perfectly unbearable.”

“She is not blessed with the sweetest temper in the world,” said Emily; “but I believe she is really attached to me, and that covers a multitude of sins. She is

rather put out just now, for I suspect that there was a little *tendresse* between her and Antonio. All those journeyings together in the rumble behind were very dangerous."

"She showed her discernment, certainly, and has had a loss."

"Hush, Caroline," said Emily, with a smile, "the wisest head may be deceived sometimes."

CHAPTER VI.

LORD ERRINGTON'S judgment proved to be more just, as it was also more kind, than that of Lord Trentham, regarding the result of the invitation transmitted to Brussels. Lady Emmeline's answer was affectionate and sisterly, more so, indeed, than could have been expected, after so many long years of forgetfulness and neglect. But her nephew had, as we have said, been careful

to word the letter so to convey only impressions of kindness and goodwill, and the result was as he had anticipated. Lady Emmeline engaged to cross over to England, as soon as the arrangements requisite for her journey could be completed, and signified that her son would also be in readiness to accompany her.

Within a fortnight after the date of Lord Errington's letter, the dreaded meeting was over, and Lady Emmeline Mandeville found herself once more an inmate of that home where so many of the happy hours of childhood had been passed. Strange were the sensations with which she looked on all the well-remembered memorials of the past, and painful the contrast between those familiar objects, bearing an aspect as unchanged as though she had quitted them but yesterday,

and herself, over whom the wear and tear of life had passed so roughly. So even had been the tenor of Lord Trentham's existence, that there was scarcely a book or a picture that was not to be found in its old resting-place. Even the great leathern chair, in which her father had been accustomed to repose, had occupied the same place as that in which Lord Trentham now reclined. Man alone, with his furrowed cheek, his bleached hair, his bent form, and, alas! the vacant places of dear ones, now gone for ever—these alone told the tale of time and of decay. Happy they who, returning after long years to some dear old scene of former happiness, can find there only the softened memories of the past, without its heart-wringing regrets—who can calmly revisit every well-known spot, nor feel the anguish of heart

which clings round even the lightest memento of the loved and the lost—of those whose presence once brightened every scene, making that appear a Paradise which now is but a dreary blank.

Wonderful was the change in the aspect of affairs in St. James's Square, consequent on the arrival of Lady Emmeline Mandeville. The old rooms gradually acquired a look of home comfort, to which they had long been strangers, and which that wandering creature, man, so rarely knows how to impart. The library was comfortable enough before, but it looked snug and cozy now. Even the household no longer crept about with the stealthy tread of those who dreaded nearly as much encountering "my lord," with his sour looks and sharp words, as one of the ghosts who were supposed to

lurk among the many uninhabited rooms of the vast mansion. But it was in Lord Trentham himself that the greatest change was perceptible. The presence of his long-forgotten, long-neglected sister seemed, after the first agitating moments of meeting were over, to have infused new vigour into his frame, and given fresh elasticity to his mind. Female society was a novelty to him, and that of Lady Emmeline, while it imposed no restraint, gave a distraction to his thoughts, and withdrew them agreeably from his own whims and ailments. Fifty topics of conversation, which had long lain dormant, and in which no other human being could have felt an equal interest with himself, were revived, and many were the hours of each day that were thus whiled away. Lord Trentham even ventured to touch upon the

circumstances of his sister's past life, and to make inquiries concerning her future intentions and prospects, more especially as regarded her son, with an interest greater than could have been expected from his previous conduct. All this seemed, indeed, little likely to tend to anything more beneficial than the gratification of the sick man's curiosity. Still, as we have said, it sufficed to engage his attention, and to withdraw him from himself, and thus, by dispelling the phantom of *ennui*, and the irritation of temper consequent thereon, to ameliorate in no small degree the existence of all those with whom he came in contact.

Of those who most especially benefited by the happy change in Lord Trentham's frame of mind, none felt it so sensibly as his son. It is always on the nearest and

dearest that inequalities of temper in the domestic circle fall the most heavily, because they alone are deprived by necessity, as well as by duty, of all power of escape. The hired dependant may go his way, and seek another master. The friend may keep aloof till the storm is past, but for those who are bound to the daily, hourly task of endurance, by ties that may not be broken—who must perforce listen to the harsh tone, the cruel word, the bitter taunt, only the more harsh and bitter when coming from lips that we love and that love us—for the bursting heart that must in silent, hopeless agony endure all this, yet hold its peace, where is there refuge or comfort? Where but in the blessed knowledge that if to bear and to forbear is one of the most difficult and painful, so it is one of the most beautiful and

acceptable sacrifices which the heart of man can offer to his Creator? Where but in the soothing remembrance that every exercise of our patience, however it may appear to spring from the faults or infirmities of those around us, is in reality a trial sent by Him who will never tempt us beyond that we are able, but will, with the temptation, make a way to escape therefrom, if in His strength—not our own—we only struggle on in the path of duty?

Lord Errington's mind was of so high an order, and of so happy a temperament, that the task of endurance had been to him far easier than it would have been to many under similar circumstances. Still it cannot be denied that it was an inexpressible relief when he found himself freed from the wearisome task which had devolved on him alone.

His mornings, and, indeed, the greater part of the day, were now free; and as Mandeville was an inmate beneath the same roof with himself, he looked forward to the facility thus afforded, together with the friendly circumstances under which it had been brought about, for cultivating an intimacy with his cousin, which their near relationship rendered natural, but which the hurry and bustle of a London season would appear to have hitherto rendered nearly impossible.

But though, in all matters of taste, of science, or of literature, Lord Errington could scarcely have found a more agreeable or congenial companion, yet on many topics of more personal interest it seemed little likely that the confidence of friendship would ever exist between them. On the subject of his marriage, particularly, there seemed

always a restraint, which generally ended in its being dismissed altogether; and though on these occasions there was nothing in Mandeville's manner that could have excited attention or provoked remark, though it was very natural to suppose that he could neither feel as deeply nor express himself as warmly as his cousin, still there was a something in the cold assent and the constrained congratulation that *did* fall strangely on Lord Errington's ear, though probably both would have passed unheeded but for those few careless words of his father, forgotten by the speaker almost as soon as uttered.

True friendship can never exist where confidence is accorded only by halves; and it very soon became evident that though the utmost cordiality existed between them,

there was still a dark corner in the heart of one at least, into which the vision of the other was never destined to penetrate. Whatever might have been his vague suspicions of any unfortunate attachment on Mandeville's part, Lord Errington's trust in Emily's affection for himself remained unabated. The surmises which had once caused him some uneasiness, and given rise to the conversation which has been formerly related, seemed entirely obliterated by recent events, and the only result produced by his present reflections was a resolution to abstain in future from all allusions to a subject which, however interesting to himself, was evidently not acceptable to his cousin.

January was now approaching, for a weary month had passed away since Lady

Emmeline had taken up her abode in London, when an incident occurred to break the monotony of an existence which to Mandeville, depressed as he had been by the occurrences of the last few months, was becoming irksome in the extreme. He was crossing Cavendish Square, on a bright, sunny morning, towards the close of December, when his ear was assailed and his progress arrested by the eager greeting of two tiny forms that came bounding towards him in all the unrestrained joyousness of childhood. It was little Carry and Georgy, who, returning from their daily walk in the park, had recognized their old favourite, and had flown to meet him in an ecstasy of delight too genuine not to be gratifying.

Mandeville was already aware that Aunt Dorothy, with Gertrude and the children,

was passing the winter in Portland Place, but he was unacquainted with either of the former, and had rather avoided than sought an opportunity of finding himself once more beneath the roof where so many happy hours had been passed. His name was, however, too familiar to render any further introduction necessary than that which his unexpected *rencontre* had produced ; and as Aunt Dorothy and Emily's fair sister joined the group, Mandeville found himself at once accosted as an old friend. The next moment he was walking by their side, conversing with that ease which lent such a charm to everything he said, and ere five minutes were passed, between the friendly invitation of Aunt Dorothy, the gentle force of the two children, and some irresistible impulse which overcame all his previous intentions, he actually

found himself ascending the stair, and entering that well-known drawing-room, fraught with so many sweet and bitter recollections.

Had Mandeville been aware of what was before him, when he set out on his walk that morning, he unquestionably would have turned his steps in any direction but that he had chosen. As it was, however, there was now no avoiding the necessary routine which even common politeness demanded; but with all his usual self-command, it was a task which cost him no small pain to accomplish. He had already heard from Lord Errington of the arrival of the Morton party at Naples, and of Emily's amendment. Still, as a matter of course, he was now compelled to ask fresh tidings of the travellers, and particularly of the invalid, and that,

too, without any greater appearance of interest than his own intimacy might seem to warrant. He was, moreover, obliged to hear all the details which Aunt Dorothy good-naturedly chose to furnish, and even to listen to a paragraph in a letter from Emily herself, written in a tone of recovered cheerfulness, to which — who knew so well as himself?—she had long been a stranger. Little did good, kind Aunt Dorothy imagine the torture of which, during that short half hour, she was the unconscious cause. Still less could Mandeville have believed that he would again have ventured to subject himself to its repetition. When he rose to take his leave and descended the stair, it was with a silent determination to quit London rather than encounter the annoyance of another visit to Portland Place.

How vain are all human projects! How entirely at fault the most perfect calculations of which human foresight is capable! Mandeville turned out of Portland Place, as we have said, with a fixed determination to return there no more. Not even the friendly wish that they should soon see him again, expressed by Aunt Dorothy at parting, nor the vociferous entreaties of little Carry and Georgy, nor the winning grace of Gertrude Morton, had had power to efface the first painful impression produced by his late unexpected *rencontre*. With thoughts entirely abstracted from everything around him, he almost unconsciously walked on, alone with memory, as much as though he had been the only passenger in those busy streets, till at last he found himself once more turning into

St. James's Square. It is wonderful the soothing influence of a quiet uninterrupted walk in the clear bright air, and the cheery sunshine, with unbroken reflections to boot—wonderful, too, the attractive powers of a kind reception, even from strangers—how much more so from those near and dear to one deep in our affections. The heart drinks in so eagerly, and responds so warmly to, those kind tones which seem like a link between the loved and absent and ourselves! By the time Mandeville reached the steps of Trentham House, the first painful impression had worn off, and he had almost congratulated himself on the chance that had in a manner compelled him to renew an acquaintance with the Morton family, an event to which he had for some time been looking forward with

feelings far more of reluctance than of pleasure, but which, so nearly connected as they soon would be with himself, he was aware could not much longer be delayed. It became almost a relief then to feel that the first inevitable step was over, that the first mention of Emily's name, and the conversation to which it had naturally given rise, were happily past; and finally, as Mandeville glanced round the great gloomy library, and then thought of the sunny cheerful drawing-room in Portland Place, with those little joyous voices to greet him as of old, with Aunt Dorothy's sweet placid face, and that of Emily's fair and graceful sister, he began to think that a second visit would not be so very irksome. Neither would it be so unwelcome to hear the name of her he loved

pronounced by lips that loved her—to hear of her whereabouts without any effort of his own, and without the restraint which naturally pervaded his intercourse with his happier cousin on this particular subject.

There was one circumstance, indeed, which would have rendered any frequent intercourse with the Morton family somewhat irksome, and that was the probable chance of frequently encountering Lord Errington at their house—that house where his presence was peculiarly calculated to revive painful impressions. Lord Errington's visits were, however, now not likely to be of any long continuance, for the amelioration in Lord Trentham's health, and the careful tending by which he was surrounded, gave hopes at length that his

son would now, ere long, be able to fulfil his long hoped for project of joining the Morton party in Italy, and his doing so had, in fact, been already discussed more than once. Letters had already been received, announcing the time of their departure for Rome, where Lord Errington looked forward to meeting them, with anticipations, it may be believed, heightened by so long and painful a separation. His wishes were cordially seconded by Lady Emmeline, in whose society the earl had learned, if not to forget his ailments, at least to endure them more patiently, so that, between the cheering influence of the little circle by which he was surrounded, and the amendment which had in reality taken place, Lord Trentham was at last brought to volunteer an opinion that already his

son had been detained too long, and that his departure should not be longer delayed. Lord Errington needed no solicitations to hasten his preparations. Ere another week was ended, he had crossed the Channel, and was wending his way to the 'sweet south' as fast as French roads and French post-horses would admit of.

His departure was a relief to Mandeville in more ways than one. Despite all the better feelings of his nature, and many they were, all clouded as they had been, he had never been able entirely to shake off a feeling of restraint when in Lord Errington's society. From childhood he had been accustomed to consider him at least with indifference, if not with any stronger feeling, for the exceeding reserve of manner engendered by Lord Errington's mode of life had,

with the few who had any opportunity of seeing him, given rise to a totally false estimate of his character, and neither to Lady Emmeline nor her son had any occasion presented itself of judging of him from personal experience, till the cousins met for the first time in London. Little disposed to regard with favour the son of Lord Trentham, who had evinced towards an idolized mother neither brotherly kindness nor affection, Mandeville had always shrank from an intimacy with one whose tastes and habits, moreover, were, as he believed, so entirely unsuited to his own. And though, later, his discernment led him to discover, and his better feelings to acknowledge, that the world had done Lord Errington wrong, still the prejudices imbibed in childhood—prejudices which are perhaps never

wholly uprooted—together with the pride of heart inherent in almost all of his race, insensibly combined to keep him aloof from his lordly cousin. To these, ere long, was added the unlooked-for rivalship, which completed the work of estrangement, and it can scarcely be wondered at if Mandeville now more than ever shunned the presence of one who, invested with those worldly advantages, the want of which he had himself never felt so cruelly before, had besides been made, however unintentionally, the instrument of wounding both his vanity and his affection.

All this was still recent when Lord Trentham's proposition, conveyed through the kindly mediation of his son, reached Lady Emmeline, and Mandeville at once perceived the expediency, as well as justice,

of stifling, as much as might be, his own repugnance at finding himself not only the guest, but the constant companion of his cousin. The effort was made, and with tolerable success; yet still, as we have before said, it was a relief when Lord Errington's departure rendered that effort no longer necessary, and it was with feelings of no small satisfaction that Mandeville beheld the travelling-chariot drive from the door, even though mingled with many bitter regrets at the destination which an untoward fate alone had transferred from himself to his more fortunate cousin.

CHAPTER VII.

It was a lovely morning, in the month of February, as bright, balmy, and genial as an April day in these our northern climes. The whole population of Rome was already astir, for it was the last day of the most brilliant carnival wherewith the Eternal City had been enlivened for many a long year, and already was heard the note of preparation for the closing act of that most singular

scene, where the deepest passions and the darkest crimes—where sober reason and staid sense—youth and age—wisdom and folly, all yielding to the maddening influence of the hour, were combined in one wild chaos of fun, frolic, and enjoyment.

The vista, a mile in length, of the street called the Corso, was beginning to wear its usual picturesque appearance; for the inmates of the houses on either side, in trustful reliance on the extreme beauty of the morning, were hanging their windows betimes, that they might themselves be free to go forth and join the merry groups already congregating below. Here was a stately palazzo, its windows decorated with hangings of blue damask fringed with silver, for the inmate is a Portuguese noble of high degree, and blue is his national colour. Beside it, a land-

lord of humbler pretensions has hung his balconies with a faded yellow, edged with tarnished gold, that has already done service for many a year before, but looking gay and flaunting withal; and further on, the saucy lackey of a Milord Inglese, is adjusting the draperies of crimson and gold, with an ostentatious sneer at the faded green hangings in process of arrangement at the windows beside his own. By degrees, every window in the long line has its gay pendants, with fringing of gold or silver, till at the further extremity we reach the palace of the Torlonia, distinguished by its hangings of fine tapestry. And now the balconies begin to fill, and the streets to swarm with motley groups, in every various travestie that wit or taste can devise. The mounted guards take their stations to preserve order, and a hard

time they have of it. Carriages begin to roll, filled with gay groups, some distinguished and some not, but all wearing the little wicker masks, an indispensable safeguard from the shower of small shot to which all are indiscriminately exposed. And now the actual business of the day begins in earnest. A double file of carriages, in slow and endless procession, parades the Corso, while from the thronged windows above, and the swarming street below, a ceaseless interchange of missiles—bouquets, bonbons, and small shot of various kinds, is incessantly kept up.

“Ecco, fiori! ecco, fiori!” screamed the voice of a stout vendor of flowers, in a fantastic costume, with a hideous mask, as a halt in the procession enabled him to approach, with his basket of bouquets, the

carriage nearest to him. "Fiori, signore, fiori," repeated the man, at the same time springing on the wheel and displaying his wares to those within.

"No, no, we have enough already," said a sweet voice from behind its wicker mask.

"Ma vede, signora, they are beautiful—all for a scudo—you will take them all"—and without waiting for assent, the flower vendor emptied his basket into the laps of those within.

"But see, we do not want them," repeated another voice, which was indeed evident, for the carriage was literally laden with flowers, and the speaker removed her mask, and began gathering up the flower-vendor's treasures, in order to restore them.

"Ha!" he muttered inaudibly, behind

his mask, as the fair speaker's countenance became visible, "ben trovata, Signora mia."

At that moment the carriage moved on. The flower-vendor sprang to the ground, but in so doing, severely bruised his right hand against the door to which he had been clinging. The pain caused him to pause a moment, but the next instant he was by its side again.

"You keep my flowers, Signora?" he exclaimed, in a sharp tone between pain and anger.

"We have too many already, sir," said the former speaker, who had not perceived the accident.

"Bene"—and in a moment the basket was refilled and returned—the mask made a mock obeisance, and uttering the words, "A rivederle," the carriage passed on.

The same strange figure, with its hideous mask, was observed several times again in the course of the morning, but its importunities were not renewed, and the affair was forgotten, as one of the many incidents which that hour of universal license permitted.

“I am very tired—are you, Caroline?” inquired Emily Morton, as their carriage came to a stand-still a few doors from their own house, and beneath a balcony from which a merciless discharge of bouquets, bonbons, and small shot was descending like hail.

“A la mort, carina,” answered Lady Wrexham, yawning behind her mask, and then looking up languidly to see from whence the shower descended. “If you have had enough of this, I should be too glad to escape from further onslaught.”

“Volontieri.” The order was given, and in a few minutes Lady Wrexham and Emily found themselves ensconced behind the crimson draperies of their own balcony in the Corso, looking down on the gay throng below, which, seen from above, now presented as gorgeous and picturesque a scene as can well be imagined. The whole length of the street was, as we have said, draped with various colours—blue, yellow, crimson, green, fringed with lace of gold or silver. Every window was thronged with spectators, while, even in the street below, rows of chairs, or other temporary erections, some of them draped with the same gaudy colours, encroached on the pavement for the benefit of those unable to afford themselves any more elevated point of view. A double file of

carriages, many of them adorned with most quaint or classical devices, and filled with groups fantastically attired, pursued their ceaseless course, the vacant space densely filled by pedestrians in every imaginable travestie, mingled here and there with the gleaming corslets of the Papal soldiers, whose duty it was to keep order, while the strange din of sounds, the tumultuous merriment, the ready wit, the shrill cry of some animal, whose guise had been adopted for the occasion, with the merry music of itinerant bands, together with the perpetual hail of missiles, fragrant or frolicsome, across the street, from window to window, from balcony to carriage, from carriage to pedestrian—all combined to form a scene as picturesque to the eye, as it was bewildering to the senses.

“What a gay, beautiful picture this would make, Caroline,” said Emily, as she leaned on the balcony, and looked up and down the gorgeous street of which the house commanded a nearly uninterrupted view.”

“Very, carina,” said Lady Wrexham, with her eyes half shut, and without rising from the chair into which she had thrown herself. “But you know this is the ninth day of my third carnival, and I am afraid my enthusiasm is a little worn out.”

“Why, to own the truth, so I think would mine be, were it to last much longer. I begin sadly to begrudge the time we are losing, and as to doing anything reasonable while the carnival lasts—”

“As well expect to escape hydrophobia, after submitting to the bite of a mad dog,

carina. Everyone else goes mad, so we must do the same—but for a whole nine days—*c'est un peu trop*. However, it will all be over to-night, and we will set about sights to-morrow in good earnest."

"To-night?—ah, Caroline, that reminds me," said Emily, turning from the gay scene below, and seating herself beside Lady Wrexham—"why were you so cruel as to take part against me about that odious ball?"

"Why, carina? Because I was resolved you should see it for once, and I knew I was leading you into nothing you would repent."

"If you only knew what I would give to stay away."

"And if you knew what I would give to have you there. You may be sure, dear,

I would not urge you going, if there could be the least objection to it. Even Sir William, and you know how particular he is, was against you."

"Well—yes; but you know some one else's opinion on the subject, Caroline; and I would ten thousand times rather abide by it now he is absent, than even were he present."

"That is all very good and very proper, dear. I have nothing to say against it, but believe me, in the present case, you are over scrupulous. In the first place, we are not going masked, nor shall we quit our own box. In the second, there is a wide difference between a masked ball in Rome, and a masked ball in Paris, and it was of the last, I remember, that your own dear somebody spoke so reprovngly."

“I do not remember that he made any distinction, and this is still a masked ball, Caroline.”

“Dear Emily, do be reasonable. You will so cruelly disappoint my aunt. She seems to have set her heart on your going to-night, and indeed I would not urge it if there were a shadow of impropriety.”

Emily made no reply, and at that moment the first gun was fired for the clearing of the Corso. Carriages now drove off in various directions, for pedestrians alone were permitted to remain in the street which from time immemorial has derived its name from the scene about to be enacted in it. Windows and balconies became more densely crowded than ever, for everyone was hastening to whatever post could best command the passage of the riderless steeds in the

singular race which was to follow. Presently the crowd drew back on either side, the midspace remained free, and a party of mounted cuirassiers, sword in hand, galloped at speed from one extremity to the other, effectually clearing the course. Then the horses were led to their starting post, in the Piazza del Popolo, the last gun was fired, the rope was lowered, and off they darted, the people closing in tumultuously in their track, till the goal was attained and the steeds secured at the farther extremity of the long street, which, from this ancient custom, at that point takes the name of "Via dei Ripresi dei Barberi."

The balcony, in undisputed possession of which Lady Wrexham and Emily had previously been left, had, like the rest, become quickly filled, and all further commu-

nication between them, except on matters of general interest, was cut off. Every eye was eagerly fixed on the scene below, and even Emily herself, in the excitement of the moment, forgot whatever else the day was to bring forth. Her name, pronounced by her mother behind her, caused her to look round, and, as she did so, she perceived an addition to their party in the person of the Duke of L——, whose acquaintance they had made during their three months' stay at Naples. However gratifying to Mrs. Morton's weak and foolish vanity might have been the attentions of a prince of the blood royal to her daughter, to Emily herself they were anything but welcome, and had, in fact, furnished her with an additional motive for absenting herself as much as possible from all society during the period of their stay at

Naples. She was a little startled at the prince's appearance, and received him with a manner more coldly courteous than Mrs. Morton thought his rank and station demanded. His visit, however, was short, and Emily had the satisfaction of seeing him take his leave, little dreaming that, as he did so, he had extracted from Mrs. Morton the information that they should meet again at the ball that evening.

"This is a doomed day with me, Caroline, I think," whispered Emily, as, having regained Lady Wrexham's side, they leaned together over the balcony.

"How, carina?"

"Did you not see the Prince of L——? He arrived from Naples last night, and has just been here."

"No, indeed," said Lady Wrexham, turn-

ing her head towards the group behind her.

“ Oh, he is gone. He stayed but a few minutes, and then vanished.”

“ So vanish all your enemies, carina,” whispered Lady Wrexham, laughing. “ It matters very little,” she added, “ for the apparition that will scare away that and all other *désagrémens* cannot be much longer delayed. You told me his last letter spoke of the tenth, which, you know, is early next week. Let us come in and rest ;” and they turned from the balcony, as their windows, in common with all others, were being dismantled, in preparation for the next act in that day of ceaseless animation and excitement.

Lady Wrexham had proposed dining earlier than usual, as the only means of

satisfactorily getting through all that was to be done, for the approach of twilight would be the signal for the commencement of the *moccaletti*, and the *moccaletti* would be immediately succeeded by the ball, which, as the concluding festivity of the carnival, must necessarily terminate by twelve o'clock, to avoid breaking in on the first morning of Lent. Strange prelude to the most solemn season of the Christian year. Strange method of preparing the minds of a people, naturally addicted to the indulgence of every fiercer passion, for the calm meditation proper to that week, which in Rome, less perhaps than in any other great city of the Christian world, can claim the name of *Holy*.

With spirits somewhat worn out by the excitement of the morning, and still more by the

anticipations of the evening, in the arrangement of which she had been induced to acquiesce only in deference to her mother's wishes, Emily went to make some change in her toilet, which, at all times simple, was studiously so on this occasion. Unconscious that she was thus infinitely more lovely than the richest attire could have made her, she rejected every addition that Mademoiselle Célestine successively produced, to the infinite mortification of the tire-woman.

“Une seule rose, mademoiselle.”

“Not for the world, Célestine.”

“And mademoiselle will make no change, not even for the ball?”

“No; it does very well so, and the plainer one is dressed the better.”

“Mais, mademoiselle, e'est un bal, n'est-ce

pas ? ” persisted the waiting-woman, in seemingly innocent surprise at the demi-toilette of her young lady.

“ My dress does very well, I assure you, Célestine,” said Emily, quietly, preparing to leave the room.

“ Then, mademoiselle, may I go out and see the moccoletti ? ”

“ Certainly.”

“ Et puis,” continued Célestine, “ Carlo tells me there are balls all over the place, something like what mademoiselle is going to, and that every one goes to see them. If mademoiselle does not want me any more, I may go, may I not ? ”

“ Certainly not, Célestine; mamma would be very much displeased if you went to a masked ball.”

“ Mademoiselle is going to a masked ball,”

observed the tirewoman, with an insolent toss of the head.

Emily's cheek coloured at the rebuke. There was a wide difference between the masked ball, and the mode in which she was going to it, and that in which her waiting-maid was likely to take a part. She did not, however, choose to enter upon a discussion, which would probably only have subjected her to further insolence, and therefore merely said:—

“I think you must forget to whom you are speaking, Célestine. With respect to the masked ball, you may ask mamma. If she gives you permission, of course you may go; if not, I absolutely forbid it”—and she quitted the room.

“Ask permission, indeed—with the certainty of being refused! I was a fool to

ask at all," muttered Célestine, her dark brow lowering, as she stood a moment after Emily closed the door. "I thought she would have known too little about it to have refused me, and with leave I was safe;" and she mentally recapitulated all the merry scenes of a similar kind in which she had borne a conspicuous part in her native Paris. "It would be folly to leave them now, and yet—je m'ennuie à la mort. Ah, nothing has been the same since Antonio went away, and it was all *her* doing," and for a moment some tender recollection softened the expression of that dark countenance. But the next moment Célestine's brow lowered, as, muttering similar disjointed sentences, she completed the arrangement of her young lady's apartment, stole across the corridor to ascertain that the whole party was safe at the dinner-table, and then hurried to her own.

CHAPTER VIII.

“AND now to find a domino,” muttered the indomitable Frenchwoman, as, after stealthily closing the door, she descended the stair, passed through the *porte-cochère* and found herself in the street, uncertain which way to turn in search of a disguise wherewith to fulfil her intention.

“Oh, were I only in my own dear Paris ; but here, in this strange place—mais, cou-

rage, if my wits fail me now it will be for the first time."

Still Célestine paused a moment, as if by a little reflection to sharpen those wits on which she relied in her present emergency, and as she did so, a strange-looking figure on the opposite side, which had apparently been watching her movements, crossed the street, and availing itself of the general license, addressed a few complimentary words to her *beaux yeux*. Aware that to evince either indignation or surprise would be but to subject herself to further molestation, an interruption which would have been peculiarly inconvenient in the errand on which she was bent, she made no reply, but turned at once down the street, ruminating, as she went, on the chances that were to direct her, in a city where she had

passed but nine days, to one of the many repositories of which she was in search. She looked from side to side, but in vain. Many of the shop windows had been displaced, to make way for the temporary erections which were now once more in process of dismemberment, and of those that remained not one gave token of such wares as would suit her present purpose. At length, threading one of the narrow streets which connect the great line of the Corso with the secondary thoroughfares, she turned into the Via Condotti, and there, exactly opposite, was hung an array of gay and gaudy costumes, one of which a smart Jewish-looking girl within was displaying to a customer with all the vivacity which her calling and the moment of general festivity inspired. Célestine

paused a moment, that the bargain might be completed, and busied herself the while in examining the various gaudy costumes before her; but as she did so, she was startled by the sound of the same voice that had before addressed her.

“You have found what you were seeking, and so have I,” said the strange figure, in a voice rendered doubly uncouth from behind a frightful mask. It was the same as that worn by the flower-vendor of the morning.

Thoroughly annoyed, at no time of a very placable temper, and thus tracked, as she fancied, by some unknown spy, Célestine turned angrily away, and hurried into the shop. The mask followed. Her brow grew darker and darker, and it is difficult to say into what ebullition of anger the impulse of

the moment might have hurried her, when the figure suddenly bent its head, whispered a few words into her ear, and the next moment vanished. She rushed to the door, but in the dim light it was nowhere visible, and after a few minutes given to the recovery from the shock she had sustained, she returned into the shop, selected a plain black domino, concealed it carefully beneath the folds of her shawl, and retraced her steps homewards.

Twilight was now rapidly deepening into night, and the preparations for the moccacetti were in active progress. Again the carriages began to roll, again the double procession was formed, and again every window was crowded with spectators. But instead of the mimic weapons of the morning, every hand now carried a lighted taper,

or bore aloft some means of extinguishing that of his neighbour, and shame to him against whom the cry of “*senza moccolo*” could be raised. Brightly gleamed the long line of the Corso with its thousands of lights from the windows above and the moving mass below. Wild were the cries, and uproarious the merriment, as, with many a cunning device, each strove to maintain his own or to extinguish that of his neighbour. The maskers still wore their gay dresses, adding to the picturesqueness of the scene—adding too, alas, to the many elements of evil with which that scene was rife.

Célestine, after depositing her domino safely in her own chamber, there to bide its time, had taken advantage of her young lady’s permission, and sallied forth in the

decorous company of as many of the household as could be spared from their various avocations. But in the general hubbub, it was a somewhat difficult matter to maintain the little party intact, and though mademoiselle's maid started for her expedition under the especial protection of no less a personage than M. Adolphe, the *chef de cuisine*, himself, yet by some inexplicable chance she managed to be lost in the crowd, and as everyone was bent on his own amusement rather than on looking after a neighbour, who was, besides, so particularly well able to take care of herself, she was, after a short fruitless search, forgotten for the rest of the evening.

Célestine, meanwhile, pulled down her veil and jostled through the crowd, assailed as she passed by rude jests and cries of

“senza moccolo;” but she was too much accustomed to such scenes, and too much occupied with the object she had in view, to heed them. She paused at length in the angle of a narrow street branching off from the great thoroughfare, and nearly facing her own door, but so completely deserted and in darkness, as to offer a safe shelter to any who might have reason to seek its concealment. There the same strange figure, with its uncouth mask, was posted, and there Célestine eagerly joined it.

“I thought you were never to forget me,” said the voice behind the mask.

“Forget you?—ah—but how could I recognize you in that frightful dress, or how dream of the possibility of your being here?”

“Anima mia, all things are possible to

true love. I knew you would say an Ave for my success, and strong in that belief, I struggled on—and conquered.”

“But, in heaven’s name, how?”

“Pazienza! If you did not recognize me in this travesty, I don’t know whether you would know me a bit better without it.”

“Oh, I understand, but—”

“But—pazienza, anima mia, we must find a better place than this, ere I make you my confessor. Tell me first, who is that up in the balcony yonder with the signorina? I cannot see his face. Is that the Milord Inglese to whom she is betrothed?”

“That?—no!” exclaimed Célestine, looking up from her hiding-place. “That is the Prince of L——. Have you forgotten him at Naples? Milord is in England.”

“That is he not,” exclaimed her companion. “He is either in Rome at this moment, or will be to-night.”

Célestine was silent. Her curiosity to learn the means by which her companion’s knowledge of Lord Errington’s movements had been obtained, as well as her own mortification at finding that so important a piece of intelligence had escaped her prying propensities, both gave way before a sudden thought which flashed across her mind.

“The mocclo will last an hour longer,” said the mask at last. “For that time we are free. Come with me to the steps on the piazza. The moonlight will secure us from eavesdroppers there, and you shall know all.”

Célestine drew her veil more closely

over her face, and passed her arm through that of her singular-looking companion, and the two, passing on in silence, reached the flight of steps which connects the Piazza di Spagna with the Morte della Trinità, now bathed in a flood of moonlight, and nearly deserted, while the only sound which broke the stillness of the night was the distant hum of the multitude, or the plashing of the water, as it fell like molten silver into the fountain at their base.

CHAPTER IX.

“AND you are really safe and well, Antonio?” exclaimed Célestine, clasping her hands with a touch of genuine feeling, as she seated herself on the steps beside her companion, and turned towards him, forgetting for a moment the disguise he wore, and expecting to see the same handsome face that had so haunted her fancy since they parted.

“Hush—no names, anima mia,” answered the mask. “I am Giacomo now—Giacomo Torriano, al suo servizio—ha! ha! A pretty name, is it not? And remember we are strangers to each other, that is, till some lucky chance brings us better acquainted, which shall be soon, I promise you. But first tell me what you have been doing, and how you have fared since that luckless day.”

“Fared? Ill enough. My lady and mademoiselle are always with their heads together, and between them both I lead the life of a dog! Nothing has ever been the same since you went away, Antonio,” and a long drawn sigh completed the sentence.

“Antonio again—hush, you forget. And yet you stayed with them?”

“I stayed at Naples to be near you, and always thinking that some chance would turn up. Besides, I believed to the end that mademoiselle would not have given her evidence, and without it I suppose you would have got off.”

“To be sure I should, instead of being thrown into that cursed prison, chained hand and foot, and forced to labour like a slave. But *pazienza*, anima mia! We both owe them a grudge or two, and it will be hard if, between us, we don’t pay it yet.”

“But you will be seen and recognized here,” observed Célestine, after a moment’s pause, for the clenched hand and vehement manner of her companion almost startled her.

“Recognized? Ha! ha! Why, my

own mother would not know me. See," and as he spoke he removed the mask, and revealed to the astonished eyes of Mademoiselle Célestine a profusion of auburn locks and fair eyebrows, and a face from which every trace of the ebon moustache which had elicited so large a share of his inamorata's admiration had been carefully removed. She started—for the transmogrification was indeed perfect.

"Now listen," said the false Giacomo, resuming his mask. "Scarcely a week ago, these wrists were bound by the chains from which one word unspoken would have saved me. I can feel them even still, and a wrench to-day from the carriage of my tormentors has, by disabling this good arm, only served to sharpen the remembrance. You must help me to supply its place,

anima mia ; and then for our recompense. I cannot even think of love till revenge is satisfied."

Célestine reflected for a moment. In the subtle science of intrigue, she was like most of her countrywomen of the same class, an adept, and would have been a willing coadjutor. She would have made an admirable female *diplomate*, at least according to the notion of those who hold that craft and cunning are the most essential requisites of one. But the dark schemes of the Italian made her blood curdle, and her flesh creep. She would fain have revenged what she was pleased to term the undue severity practised towards her favourite, and which, as he had truly observed, one word unspoken by Emily Morton would at least have mitigated, if not averted altogether. She

would fain have revenged the many ranking slights, and evidences of confidence shaken, which her own unwarrantable insolence had drawn upon her; but to be accessory to any deed of violence or blood was a mode of retaliation which suited neither her character nor her inclination. Was it any spark of womanly feeling, any lingering attachment, that kept back her hand? No. Her desire for vengeance had taken as deadly a form as that of her companion, for hers had been but the attachment of self-interest, acting on an intensely selfish character. It was the difference between the nobler and the meaner animal, each seeking its own ends, through its own peculiar instincts. The quick revenge of the Italian, regardless of the danger to be incurred, was the grander feeling of a bad,

bold mind—that of the Frenchwoman, seeking, in its own security, the torture rather than the destruction of its victim, the groveling spite of a mean one.

“What are you going to do, Antonio?” inquired the calculating Célestine, at last. “If you go to work in the manner you speak of, you will of course be found out, and then—”

“And what care I, if I gain my revenge? I thought you would have helped me to it, since this arm is disabled,” interrupted the mask, vehemently.

“Pazienza, as you yourself say; I *will* help you to it, but it must be on one condition—that you leave the manner to me.”

“Well, and what then?”

“You shall be revenged still more effectually.”

Antonio paused.

“You women are too tender-hearted,” said he, at last.

“Bah !” exclaimed Célestine, indignant at the imputation. “We will both have our revenge.”

“And soon ?”

“Soon ; and now tell me what you know of milord’s movements.”

“What have they to do with this affair of ours ?”

“More than you are aware of.”

“Surely,” interrupted the mask, impetuously, “it were better to-night, in the midst of this uproar, and while there is a chance, at least, of his absence.”

“Bah !” exclaimed Célestine, again indignant at the interruption. “Tell me what you know about him.”

“Then I must come to my own history first. As soon as my limbs were free, and my metamorphosis made perfect, I thought the best thing I could do was to get away from Naples as fast as possible.”

“Naples?—but how did you get out?”

“No matter,” interrupted the mask, “I did get out; and then, having, through a friend who exactly answers my present description, procured a passport for Signor Giacomo Torriano, I managed to step on board the first packet that sailed, and reached Civita Vecchia in the best possible spirits. As I always like to make myself comfortable, and fortunately had found the means safe where I had left them in one of my old haunts, I went straight to my old friend at the “Sole,” produced a letter dated six months back from myself, Antonio, setting

forth the good qualities of myself, Giacomo. By good luck, not a word of my misfortune had reached him. I was received by the *padrone di casa* with all due deference, and promises of presentation to the first traveller who should chance to need my services. The same tide had brought in a Marseilles Packet, and with it a Milord Inglese bound for Rome, and as our destination was alike, for I need not tell you my chief aim was to reach Rome before the end of the carnival, I determined to make acquaintance with his lordship's attendants, to find out his name at least, and pave the way for introducing myself into his service, if fate favoured me. Who should he be but the milord you told me of. I got myself presented by my host as a *servitore* of the most

shining qualities, bound to Rome on his promotion, and with a half promise of engagement I left him to sleep at Civita Vecchia last night and came on here."

"And you think he will arrive to-night?"

"I suppose so, for he intended starting this morning after breakfast."

"Bien—c'est assez ; and now—allons," said Célestine, rising.

"But stop—tell me what you propose doing, anima mia—I must hear more."

"All in good time—not now."

The mask hesitated.

"Allons !" repeated Célestine in a tone of command not to be disputed.

"Well, where shall we meet, then?" inquired the mask, overpowered, as it seemed, by her influence.

“Meet me at ten o’clock in the same place, and in the dress you now wear. I shall wear a black domino, and the word is—Giacomo.”

CHAPTER X.

DARKNESS closed once more over the Eternal City. By degrees the glimmer of the last taper died away, windows were closed, carriages were seen driving off rapidly in various directions, and the crowd dispersing, the weary or sober-minded wended their way homewards through the now deserted streets, while the gayer portion of the population, of all degrees, hurried to the various theatres,

fitted up for the masked balls, the concluding scene of the year's carnival.

"My shawl, Célestine," said Emily Morton to her *soubrette*, who was punctually at her post, as she hurried into her room, for the carriage was already at the door. "Did you see the moccaletti well? The night was beautiful."

"Very, mademoiselle," said Célestine, meekly. "But I was afraid you would catch cold standing so long in the balcony."

"Long? I was not there five minutes."

"Oh, pardon, mademoiselle, but as I passed, I saw you, and miledi, and madame, and Monseigneur le Prince, and I was afraid you were going to stay there."

"You had better give me my boa, too," observed Emily, without appearing to no-

tice Célestine's anxiety on her account—
“the night is cold.”

The shawl and boa were adjusted, the party descended the stair, and the carriage had driven from the door, ere the fiendish smile on the lips of the waiting-woman had passed away.

“No, *you* must sit there, *carina mia*. We will change afterwards if you like it,” said Lady Wrexham to Emily as they entered the box in the pit tier of the Argentina, and took their places to watch the mimic scene before them.

The pit was boarded over, forming an area of considerable size, but still insufficient for the display of the innumerable costumes and disguises with which the whole space was densely crowded. Greeks and Turks, princes and peasants, Eastern

sultanas and Frankish ladies, masks of every imaginable hideousness, and disguises of every conceivable kind, were strangely mingled with dominoes, generally of plain black silk, the most impenetrable disguise of all. After a time, the crowd somewhat thinned, and the scene became proportionably more amusing, as the dresses of the maskers were better displayed, while the spirit of fun and frolic, which had been so amazingly sustained throughout the whole preceding nine days, seemed now to have reached its climax.

The scene was so new and so exciting, that, in spite of all her previous reluctance to witness it, Emily was interested and amused. It seemed impossible to resist the exhilarating influence of the moment, heightened as it was by the over-excite-

ment which had necessarily pervaded the labours of that whole day, and as her spirits, or, more properly speaking, that which is often mistaken for them, rose, her manner gradually acquired the almost feverish animation to which for many months it had happily been a stranger. Group after group, and mask after mask, meanwhile passed by, though none presumed so far on the license of the hour as to invade the privacy of, or attempt to attract more than a passing notice from, the gay little party in Mr. Morton's box, and Emily had forgotten everything but the amusement of the scene before her, when her attention was attracted by the notes of a guitar apparently in the box adjoining her own. Notwithstanding the confusion of sounds all around, its soft low

tones were distinctly audible, though the minstrel, whoever he might be, continued invisible to the whole party, as, after a slight prelude, he chanted, rather than sung, the following words in the soft accents of music's own language :—

Oh ! tell me not that heaven's own blue
Was ever half so purely bright
As the soft violet's purple hue,
That steeps those orbs in liquid light.

Nor say the rose's loveliest bloom
Could ever with that cheek compare,
Or match the lip whose smiles illumine
No thought an angel might not share.

Vainly the spotless lily now
Her purest robe would proudly wear,
Shamed by the marble of that brow,
Than fairest lily far more fair.

And say, when morning's glowing rays
To orient light their beams unfold,
Hath aught so beauteous woo'd thy gaze
As yon bright tress of waving gold?

But hush, my lute, lest Zephyr's wing,
All jealous of that perfumed sigh,
Should rudely rend the quivering string
That at *her* feet alone would die!

As the last notes died away, the listeners still preserved the silence they had maintained, expecting that something more would follow, but the music ceased, and the minstrel apparently had vanished.

“A very pretty song, indeed,” said Mr. Morton, at last, with more than his usual animation. “What was the musician like, Emily? Could you see anyone?” he inquired of his daughter, who was seated in the angle facing the box from which the sounds had seemed to issue.

“I fancied I saw a black domino for a moment,” said Emily, “but the curtain was half-drawn, and he had vanished before the song began.”

“Well, shall we take a turn in the *parterre*?” said Mr. Morton, to Sir William Wrexham, without further comment on so ordinary an occurrence, and the two gentleman quitted the box, leaving Lady Wrexham with Mrs. Morton and her daughter alone.

“I wonder who was your troubadour, carina,” said Caroline, as the door closed.

“Mine, dear,” exclaimed Emily, laughing. “Just look round at all the blue eyes, red cheeks, and yellow locks you see here, and you will find plenty of subjects for the troubadour’s lay. Look, for instance, at that shepherdess,” she continued, laughingly pointing out the caricature of a Swiss peasant, with cheeks like a peony and a profusion of saffron braids.

“Fie, carina! The troubadour was a

poet. You wrong him. What was he like? ”

“ Like—how can I tell? It might have been the black apparition, or it might not. If it was, he was a most unpoetical-looking minstrel certainly.

“ Do you see that tall, stiff, stately-looking thing, with his arms folded, leaning against the pillar opposite, carina? ” said Lady Wrexham, calling Emily’s attention to a tall, black domino on the other side, who, as the crowd passed to and fro, was every now and then distinguishable. “ I have a strange fancy that that is your troubadour.”

Emily looked in the direction indicated, and as she did so she saw, or fancied she saw, the eyes of the tall, motionless figure, even through its disguise, fixed upon her—

self. Involuntarily the colour rushed up into her cheek, though the intervening crowd had already shut out the black domino from her view, and she turned to Lady Wrexham with a feeling of vague discomfort, which, though she felt it to be almost ludicrous, yet seemed perfectly irresistible.

“I wish you would take my place now, and give me your nook, Caroline,” said she, making way for Lady Wrexham in the front of the box.

“No—no, carina. I am very comfortable here, and I have seen it so often.”

“And I quite enough. I am really beginning to be tired, and should be glad to be in that quiet corner; and besides, your black effigy has scared me,” she said, with a light laugh.

Lady Wrexham did as she was requested, and Emily ensconced herself in the shade, really glad to escape from the glare, which, now that the lassitude of fatigue was gradually succeeding to previous over-excitement, was every moment becoming more wearisome. She had scarcely done so when the door of the box opened, and the Prince of L—— entered. Inexpressibly annoyed, Emily, without very well knowing what she was doing, half rose from her chair, but the Prince, misinterpreting the movement, at once took possession of that beside her, and she had no choice left but to submit with the best grace she could to the visitation, the dread of which she had in the multiplicity of objects around her, hitherto totally forgotten.

“You have chosen an excellent position,”

said he to Mrs. Morton, with that courteousness of manner which always seems doubly gracious when belonging to royalty.

"I am glad your Royal Highness thinks so," replied she, not a little gratified at being publicly seen in the company of so distinguished a visitor.

"The carnival has, I think, been particularly good this year," pursued the Prince; "but you have come to Rome at rather an unfortunate moment," said he, turning to Emily, "for with to-night all its gaieties cease."

"I believe we chose this season for our visit on that account," said Emily. "Gaiety, I fear, would have little attraction for me, for I rarely venture out in the evening."

"You will be at the Neapolitan Embassy on Saturday, of course."

“I fancy not.”

“No? And you are still resolved on quitting our country without learning to know us better?”

“I have already learned to admire Italy above all things,” said Emily, evasively, and colouring slightly, for the Prince’s manner embarrassed her. “There is,” added she, quickly, in fear that even words so trivial might be misconstrued, “so much to see and to admire in Rome, that we should have little time, and I believe still less inclination, for evening amusements.”

“The Prince was silent. It was not often that his courtesies—the condescensions of royalty—were so coldly received. Common report had not erred in ascribing to him an agreeability of manner, which, though unaccompanied by any sterling qualities,

nevertheless rendered his society exceedingly attractive as the companion of an hour. He was, of course, familiarly acquainted with all the abounding objects of interest in that most interesting of all cities, and as he now flew lightly from one to the other, well pleased at having found any subject that could win a smile from *la bella Inglese*, Emily's attention was insensibly arrested. That the theme was inexhaustible may well be believed, and Mrs. Morton, in the vanity of her heart, was well enough disposed that it should be so, and none the less for observing the many curious looks that from time to time were bent on the little group around her. Sir William Wrexham and Mrs. Morton had, meanwhile, returned, and the conversation had thus become general, still it was to Emily the

prince's remarks were chiefly directed, and towards her the attention of the passers-by was principally attracted.

“Quanto è bella!” exclaimed a mask to his companion, as they slowly passed by.

“And who is that with her?”

“Do you not know?—the Prince of L——.”

“Ah, è vero”—and the intonation in which the words were spoken, implied anything but a flattering compliment to the fair stranger who had so unconsciously become the subject of observation.

“I think you had better soon move to avoid the crowd,” whispered Sir William to his wife, as he observed the night waning apace, and the throng gradually lessening; and taking the hint, Lady Wrexham, with her usual dexterity, seized the first oppor-

tunity to break into the thread of an argument on the relative attractions of ancient and modern Rome, which, without some *coup-de-main*, she perceived was likely to last till midnight.

Things happen very crossly sometimes, and so it was on the present occasion. As the whole party rose, and the process of shawling was completed, Emily found herself so placed, that it seemed almost a matter of course for the prince to offer his arm, which, without actual discourtesy on her part, there was no possibility of declining, and thus they passed into the lobby, closely followed by the rest of the party.

“After all, I am very absurd—what can it matter?” was her reflection, after the first moment of annoyance was past. “A few days more, and then,”—and a smile

passed over her beautiful features, as she remembered the short space that must elapse ere the promised arrival of the absent one.

“Carina,” whispered Lady Wrexham, as they all paused a moment, behind the shelter of a folding-door, for the carriage to draw up, “look!—I am sure that must be your *troubadour*, or the black scarecrow at least,” and Emily, looking up, perceived at a little distance a tall, black domino, moving away in another direction.

“Hush, Caroline, there are fifty such here.”

The next moment, the carriage had driven from the door. The labours of the carnival were ended, and Emily, at length completely worn out, threw herself back in the carriage, while all the fantastic appear-

ances of the last three hours, but most of all that of the tall, black domino, she scarce knew why, chased each other rapidly through her imagination.

CHAPTER XI.

It was past nine o'clock on the same evening, when a travelling carriage reached the gates of Rome, and after the delay of a few minutes, was suffered to proceed on its way towards one of the principal hotels on the Piazza di Spagna. The viscount's coronet emblazoned on the panels here proved a wonderful open sesame, for though but ten minutes earlier, on the application of some

way-worn travellers, who at that late hour and busy season seemed little likely to procure any better shelter than their own crazy vehicle afforded, the house had been declared full to overflowing; yet no sooner did the new comer present himself, than the doors flew open to receive him, and in five minutes he was installed in his apartments, and surrounded by all the means and appliances which a long day's travel might be supposed to render doubly acceptable.

Leaving his attendants to make all the necessary arrangements, the traveller, however, at once sallied forth and took his way towards the Corso, already entirely deserted for the gayer scenes we have just been describing. His errand was bootless; for though a letter had been duly written, and duly despatched, announcing his arrival in

Rome for that very evening, yet, on reaching Mr. Morton's door, the only welcome that awaited Lord Errington, for it was he, was that which the watchful care of Mademoiselle Célestine had prepared for him, in a faithful history of the proceedings of the day, winding up with the evening's ball, and embellished with whatever addition her inventive genius thought most suitable for the occasion.

"They are gone to the Argentina, then?"

"I think so, milord; for I heard Monseigneur le Prince L—— order his coachman to drive there."

Lord Errington turned from the door and regained the street. It was dark, silent, and solitary, and as he slowly retraced his steps towards his own hotel, the

depressing influence which, in that vast memorial of the past, is at times so powerfully perceptible, made itself felt in a sense of loneliness, the more acute probably from the anticipations by which it had been preceded.

That Emily should have accompanied the rest of her family to the evening's amusement was nothing extraordinary — why should he be so selfish and unreasonable as to expect she would not have done so? And yet, judging by his own feelings, it *did* seem strange that after a separation of five long months, so long that to him each in itself had seemed an age, she should have been absent at the very moment of his arrival which he had written to announce. Too sensitive not to be wounded at any appearance of coldness, yet too trusting and

too generous to believe in its possibility, Lord Errington endeavoured to strengthen himself in the conviction that his letter by some unforeseen chance had never reached its destination. And yet the French maid, who, in the absence of the greater part of the household, had officiously taken on herself to answer his ring for admittance, evinced so little surprise at his appearance, nay, had so evidently expected his coming, that he was compelled, however reluctantly, to abandon the idea. Lost in reflection, he slowly pursued his way, traversed the Via della Croce, and re-entered the Piazza. It was bathed in a flood of moonlight, and as Lord Errington paused a moment beside the fountain, and then raised his eyes towards the flight of steps beyond, communicating with the height above, he passed on and began to

ascend them towards the Monte Pincio. As he did so, two figures—the darkness of their dress, blending with the deep shadow of an adjoining house, having hitherto prevented his observing them—suddenly emerged into the moonlight, and while the shorter of the two passed on, the other advanced towards him. Lord Errington stopped short, and faced the new comer, for the disguise he wore, no less than the hour and the spot, at that time somewhat notorious as the scene of many a deadly act of revenge or plunder, seemed to imply no very friendly intention, but the man appeared to guess his suspicions, and paused at the same moment that he did so.

“Signore, you are mistaken. I am a friend, and not an enemy,” said a voice unrecognizable through a black silk mask.

“You have mistaken me for another,

probably—if so, good night,” replied Lord Errington, about to pass on, but still keeping his eye on his companion.

“*I* am not mistaken, but *you* are—otherwise, you would be at this moment at the Teatro Argentina, instead of rambling by moonlight on the Monte Pincio.”

“Thank you for your advice,” replied Lord Errington, startled at finding his thoughts thus echoed by a stranger; “but the Teatro Argentina has no charms for me, and the Monte Pincio has many.”

“None?—and yet you are right. You would return with regrets from the one, and with none from the other. Felicissima notte, signore,” and the figure sprang down the steps, rejoined its companion, and was out of sight in a moment.

“This will never answer—the very first

step has failed," exclaimed the tall mask vehemently, as the two passed quickly into the Via Condotti.

"Failed!—in what?"

"He is too cold to be suspicious."

"Bah!—you do not know him, and are over-hasty. Patience and — *laissez-moi faire*. While we are talking, the ball will be half over. Come,"—and even in his revenge, the hot-brained Italian suffered himself to be entangled in the meshes which the subtle Frenchwoman had woven round him.

Lord Errington, meanwhile, stood for a few moments watching the retreating figure of his singular interlocutor, and then turning, he pursued his original intention, and mounting the steps, found himself on the summit of the Monte Pincio.

Beneath him lay a large portion of the city, with its numerous spires and cupolas, the matchless St. Peter conspicuous above all. The winding Tiber with its bridges, the Piazza del Popolo, with the adjoining Borghese Gardens, and beyond, in the distance far away, the long tract of the Campagna, now lying in the deep repose and calm effulgence of a glorious moonlight, which nowhere is so touching or so beautiful as here, in the vast city of the mighty past. Much there was to call up dark and absorbing reflections—much to raise the thoughts from the fragile to the imperishable, in the tranquil beauty of that scene, and Lord Errington's was not a mind to be lightly impressed by those associations amid which the poet and the painter love to dwell, and from which the moralist may deduce

his most useful lessons. But human nature will be human nature still; and as he stood with folded arms, gazing admiringly on the scene before him, and renewing his memories of every favourite spot, the fair vision of her in whose society he had long looked forward to the delight of re-visiting each rose before him with an interest too absorbing to leave room for any other.

Atoms light as air will sometimes turn the scale on which the happiness of a whole life is balanced, and, in like manner, the mind, when predisposed to receive any particular impression, will dwell on trifles which otherwise would pass unheeded. The little incident we have recorded a few pages back, recurred again and again to the mind of Lord Errington—not indeed with the effect intended, for he still believed that the

warning of the mask had been destined for some other, nor, had it been otherwise, would a suspicion of his betrothed, as connected with these mysterious words, have ever crossed his mind. There was a touch of romance in the whole affair, common enough, indeed, in Rome at that particular season, but which savoured too deeply of the land in which all the elements of romance had once been so ripe, not to arrest his attention. He thought of the strange contrast between the manners and habits of the "sweet south," and of our northern climes—of the ancient customs, of which none is more characteristic than the Roman Carnival, still lingering in the one, while they are rapidly disappearing in the other; and as, in the train of ideas, the concluding festival of the evening presented itself before

him, the suggestion of the black domino, recalled no doubt by his impatience to behold once more the lady of his dreams, recurred to him; he might see her at the masked ball, unseen himself, for Lord Errington, it may be supposed, had no inclination for so public a meeting, still less to take any active part in the amusements of the gay scene.

“Do you think you can procure me a domino at this hour, Luigi?” he inquired of an old servitor of former days, still in attendance on his apartments.

The domino was procured, and Lord Errington reached the ball, just as the follies of the hour were at their climax, but—strange—the black mask had prophesied truly. Comments on the “bella Inglese,” directed him without difficulty to that part

of the theatre in which was Mrs. Morton's box. Remarks on the assiduities of the Prince of L—— assailed his ears as he approached it. In silent abstraction he leaned with folded arms against a pillar, gazing on the fair and speaking countenance of his betrothed, as, lighted up with unconscious beauty and animation, she listened to the remarks of the prince who sat beside her.

But let it not be supposed that a thought of blame was mingled in Lord Errington's reflections. What could there be to condemn in the simple grace and feminine delicacy of manner which was one of Emily's greatest charms? what in her innocent enjoyment of the scene before her? Nothing. He was perfectly secure in the truth and purity of her heart. But he had beheld her countenance radiant with smiles—he

had heard, with regret, her name made the subject of comment, and coupled with that of one, the very last whose association he would have chosen for her. And then, judging by his own feelings, it *did* seem strange that after a long five months' separation, and at the very moment of his announced arrival, she should have preferred the amusement of a scene like that to the happiness of meeting once more. Could the stranger's warning have been intended for him? It might be so—at all events, the result had justified his prediction. In the gay scene he had found regrets which the solitary one could never have produced—is it not often thus?

CHAPTER XII.

MINE host of the "Sole," at Civita Vecchia, was a fast friend of Antonio, for Antonio had manifested his friendship for mine host, in the substantial manner for which his calling gave him so many opportunities; and great were the gains for which the coffers of the "Sole" were indebted to the zeal of the accomplished courier.

It was therefore no wonder if, on receiv-

ing a letter of strenuous recommendation from so profitable an acquaintance, Signor Pedrotti at once undertook to secure further patronage by promoting the advancement of his friend Giacomo; and so eloquently did he succeed in setting forth his superior qualities, that, on the morning after his arrival in Rome, on presenting himself to Lord Errington, his services were at once secured, and, as he had anticipated, one of the first duties required of him by his new master furnished him with an opportunity for cultivating with Mademoiselle Célestine the intercourse so necessary to the completion of their mutual schemes.

When the party returned from the ball, the French maid, punctually at her post, made known the fact of Lord Errington's arrival during their absence; and many a

self-reproach, all uncalled for as it was, did the intelligence bring to the heart of Emily. To be absent at such a moment! —and that, too, at a scene of which he had expressed his absolute disapproval! Already had lassitude and depression succeeded to the fatigue and over-excitement against which her still delicate frame was so little fitted to contend, and it was with an aching head that Emily that night sought her pillow, after the unsatisfying labours and disappointments of the evening.

Lord Errington had left word that he would come to breakfast, and he did so —but once more disappointment awaited him, for a feverish headache, the result of the last evening's imprudence, kept Emily a prisoner to her room. Nevertheless, his meeting with the rest of the party was a

very happy one. He learned from them that, by some unforeseen chance, his letter had *not* reached them—he had *not* been expected till the following week ; and as Lady Wrexham followed up the intelligence by detailing, in her own amusing and vivacious manner, the history of Emily's scruples regarding the masked ball, and the torrent of expostulation by which alone they had been borne down, a glad smile lighted up Lord Errington's countenance, though his heart smote him a little for having admitted even the shadow of distrust for one moment to darken his thoughts.

Towards evening Emily was sufficiently recovered to leave her room, and that evening was one of unmixed enjoyment. Many were the projects proposed, and the plans laid out, for the two months through which

the sojourn in Rome was to extend ; Lord Errington, to whom every spot was familiar, was to act the part of *cicerone*, and on the following day, under his guidance, the labours of sight-seeing were to commence.

Oh, could we sometimes look forward into the dark future !—could we, while basking in the sunshine of happiness, distinguish from afar the ominous small cloud, “no bigger than a man’s hand,” that is to deluge that future in tears, how would each moment of the fleeting present be prized and treasured ! In the happiness of reunion with him whom she had now learned to regard as the personification of all that is most excellent in human nature, Emily forgot the past, and dreamed not of the future. The present, in its unalloyed enjoyment, was so bright, that she had forgotten the possibility of change.

“These glorious Romans were, after all, sad barbarians,” observed Sir William Wrexham, as the little party, after reaching the highest attainable pinnacle of the majestic Colosseum, stood, beneath the lustre of a glorious moon, contemplating the scene in the amphitheatre beneath them.

“Yes,” replied Lord Errington; “and of all the memorials they have left behind them, not one, I think, brings the fact so forcibly before us as this.”

“But the luxury and magnificence of their buildings, their baths and palaces for instance, and the works of art by which they were adorned, surely seem to imply a high state of cultivation and refinement,” said Lady Wrexham.

“I scarcely think so. An excessive luxury is far from implying a high state of re-

finement. On the contrary, at the time those luxurious baths and palaces were constructed, the Romans were rapidly declining in civilization;—so they were in their correct taste for the arts. Their finest buildings were mostly the productions of an earlier age, and the works of art of which you speak had generally been brought from Greece.”

“No people whose sport was so barbarous could merit other than the name of barbarians,” observed Sir William. “When we remember the means by which this very building was erected, and the purposes to which it was dedicated, by an emperor reckoned one of the most humane of his race, and think of the inhuman pastimes which here were looked on with delight, not only by the noble Romans, but by their fairest

and gentlest dames, we can allow them no softer title."

"You are very hard on the old Romans, who have done so much for our amusement and edification," said Lady Wrexham. "It is true that here gladiators fought and martyrs suffered, but we moderns have our bull-fights, and have had our *autos-da-fé*."

"The victims in the bull-fight are not compulsory," replied Sir William, "and the *autos-da-fé* were always regarded with awe and horror, which indeed were the feelings they were intended to excite. Here the waste of human life was made a pastime, from which its victims had no appeal, and for which they received no pity."

"The best excuse we can find," said Lord Errington, "for the barbarities of the ancient Romans was in the absence of that Revela-

tion which had not yet dawned upon them. Of the humanising influences of Christianity they knew nothing. It was here, on this very spot, that, through the interference of a Christian, gladiatorial shows were first abolished. But we had better move on," he added, perceiving that Emily, who was under his especial care, had drawn her shawl more closely round her.

The following day had been set apart for an excursion to Frascati, and the whole party rose with spirits and anticipations as unclouded as the skies which seemed to promise nothing but unbroken sunshine.

CHAPTER XIII.

“Two minutes more, and my patience would not have held out,” said Lady Wrexham to Emily, as she joined the breakfast table on the following morning. “Just look at this despatch from Emmy Grenville, and then give me merit due for resisting them all, and waiting till you came to hear it read.”

“Dear little Emmy—why, she never

wrote so much in her life before," said Emily, as she looked over Lady Wrexham's shoulder, at the elaborate dispatch which had just arrived from England.

"She says she never before had so much to write about, carina. I have just glanced over the beginning, and it seems that all sorts of moving accidents have been happening while we were away. If you will make the tea, I will read, *en attendant*, for the good of the public, for it seems the letter is intended for us all."

"BRUNSWICK TERRACE, BRIGHTON.

"MY DEAR CAROLINE,

"I have been hunting about for some time for a quiet morning to write to you, and now that I have found it at last, I am almost frightened into laying down

my pen, when I think of the budget of news that is to be economically squeezed into the space of this one little sheet of paper. I daresay you adventurous travellers imagine that we poor English humdrums here have been leading but a sorry life of it. Keep you pity for yourselves, for I am quite certain that in all your wanderings nothing half so pleasant or interesting has occurred as the many stirring events which we have had to enliven us here. That I may keep the most interesting part of my letter (that which regards ourselves, of course, I mean) for the last, I shall begin with the adventures of no less a personage than—whom do you think?—our old friend, poor good Lady Courtney. I think I can see you all laugh at the idea of any romantic adventure con-

nected with her. Poor soul! I am writing in this merry strain, when, in truth, we have all sincerely sympathized in the calamity, for such one must call it, that has befallen her.

“ You remember that she, with Sir John and Miss Polly, went at the end of last season on a tour into Scotland. What evil genius sent them there one can hardly guess, unless it was the evil spirit himself, who followed them, and who, for his own purposes, might have put the project into Miss Polly’s head—for it was to please her they went. We came down here, as you know, in September. The Thornhams came too, and with them, or rather after them, came Sir Geoffrey Charlton. It very soon became evident to everyone that Blanche was the magnet which had

attracted him, and also evident to everyone except himself, unfortunately, that from the very first his doom was sealed. It was not very likely, indeed, that after having refused Mr. Mandeville she would marry him."

"Refused Mr. Mandeville," exclaimed Mrs. Morton—"how very strange!"

"That is a most discreet little cousin of yours, to tell such tales out of school, Caroline," said Sir William Wrexham, laughing, and very willing, if he could, to withdraw attention from Emily, who had taken her usual post at the breakfast-table, and into whose cheeks the blood had involuntarily rushed.

"Young ladies have a right to please themselves," said Mrs. Morton, in her

quiet way. "Besides, Miss Thornham is a Roman Catholic, I believe."

"And my aunt a staunch—I had almost said—a bigoted Protestant," observed Lord Errington, without having apparently noticed the change in Emily's countenance. "It could not have promised much happiness to either, I should think."

"Perhaps not," said Mrs. Morton; "but certainly I never did expect that Blanche would have refused him."

"Well, now, do let me come to the *dénouement*," said Lady Wrexham, whose quick eye had meanwhile glanced over the rest of the paper, to ensure no further misadventure, and who perceived that the kindest thing she could do was to read on.

"Sir Geoffry vanished one fine morning from the face of our Brighton earth. The

next time we heard of him was grouse shooting in Scotland, and the next—*that he was married*. Now, puzzle your brains as you will, you will never guess to whom, I am sure—married to Mary, daughter of James Courtney, Esq., and niece to Sir John Courtney, of the Regent's Park, &c., &c. He had met the Courtneys in Cumberland, at a moment when his affairs were, it seems, in a desperate condition, had jumped at the conclusion that Miss Polly must needs be her uncle's heiress—had proposed—been forbidden the house by Sir John—and two days after, had prevailed on his niece to go off with him to Gretna Green. Instead of the forgiveness which Sir Geoffry had taught both her and himself to expect, Sir John had not only peremptorily refused to see them, but has even

forbidden them to be named in his presence. Charles heard, the other day, that they were living in some small lodging in London—how, no one can tell, for, a month after their marriage, it came out that Sir Geoffry was, and had been for some time, totally ruined. Sir John is so disgusted at this specimen of our London society, that he intends, we hear, to sell the villa in the Regent's Park, and for the future to live in the country entirely. Every one is sorry for them. She is so thoroughly kind-hearted, I for one could never find amusement in her absurdities. What is to become of poor Lady Charlton I cannot think, for Charles heard they had literally nothing to live on but what he may happen to win at play! Is not this a sad history?

“I must now turn to our own affairs,

which, if not so full of adventure, are certainly much more pleasant, and will, I know, be more interesting to you. You will all rejoice (I say *all*, because I really cannot write this long dispatch again, and so you must make it public property) at the happy events which will have taken place amongst us before your return to England. First, then, Charley has beguiled Blanche Thornham into thinking so much better of him than he deserves, that she has actually consented, in the middle of next month, to entrust her happiness to his keeping. As I know he is slyly peeping over my shoulder at this moment, I shall leave out all the fine things I intended to have written on the subject, the truth being that he has become so abominably conceited, we shall be quite glad to be rid of him. Just this

much I must say—that I already love Blanche as a sister, and indeed it would be difficult for anyone knowing her as well as we do, to do otherwise.

“Laura will write you the history of everything else, which I cannot promise to do. I dare not trust myself to speak of my own happiness, dearest Caroline, lest you should think my ideas on the subject exaggerated. Do you remember your favourite, Colonel Beaumont, of the Guards? I hear his knock at the door, and must therefore lay down my pen, only adding that when next we meet I shall be, as ever, most affectionately yours, but no longer

“EMMY GRENVILLE.”

“I have suspected this for some time,” said Lady Wrexham. “Dear little Emmy! She was a good child to keep the best for

the last. Is not this a sad history of the poor Courtneys ? ”

“ It is one I cannot very well understand,” said Lord Errington ; “ for Sir Geoffry must have known that Sir John Courtney’s property was entirely in his own power. Indeed, if I remember rightly, he once put the question to me.”

“ I am afraid Lady Courtney herself has been the means of leading a great many people astray, and probably him among the number,” said Lady Wrexham. I have repeatedly heard her say what a large fortune her niece would have, in the hope, I suspect, that some ‘ poor lord,’ as she expressed it, would take the hint, and propose to the *beaux yeux de la cassette*. Poor girl !—she, at all events, has been cruelly victimized.”

“It is a pity they are leaving London though,” said Mrs. Morton, as her mind reverted to the brilliant *fêtes* in the Regent’s Park ; “they really will be a great loss.”

Lord Errington said nothing. He remembered how often Sir John and Lady Courtney, during their evanescent appearance on the London stage, had been made the subject of comment and ridicule.

“Where are we bound to-day?” inquired Mr. Morton, as the party rose and separated, to prepare for the morning’s excursion.

“To the Capitol and Forum ; to-morrow to Frascati, and the next day to Tivoli.”

Ah ! who may tell what the morn will bring forth ?

CHAPTER XIV.

It was a lovely day, that same 28th of February, and perfectly unalloyed was its enjoyment, for such days of unmingled happiness do exist, even in this poor world of ours, deny it who may. Away they went then, Lord Errington and Emily, Mrs. Morton and Sir William Wrexham, in one carriage, the rest, including three or four pleasant additions, disposing of themselves

as chance or their own wishes might point out. After passing Adrian's villa, an ascent of about three miles, bordered by luxuriant olive groves, conducts to the summit of the hill on which stands the small town of Tivoli, and they drove at once to the "Sibilla," preferring inferior accomodation to better quarters, on account of its exquisite situation, close to that tiny gem of antiquity, the Sibyl's Temple. How lovely it is in its decay! How perfect the pinnacle of beauty on which it stands, perched, like an eagle's nest, midway between earth and heaven! Who can tell the wild imaginings, the prophetic visions, the star-born fancies which may have swept through the brain of her, the genius of the place, as she gazed forth from her eyrie? Was it here, O Domenichino, in this scene of inspiration,

that some lovely vision of the past suggested to thy pencil those lineaments of wrapt and inspired loveliness which have given immortality both to thee and to her? Go to the Capitol, look on the great master's Sibyl, and then to Tivoli, and tell me, canst thou in memory ever disunite them more?

Lord Errington and Emily stood together on the little terrace, in front of the Sibyl's temple. Below them lay the deep dell—far, far below—already rich with verdure, and directly opposite the incomparable cascade, with all its adjuncts of beauty. Both were silent, for both were enthusiastic lovers of nature, and those who are so, when gazing on her fair face, can rarely find eloquence in words. Sir William Wrexham and Mrs. Morton stood near them, in silent admiration, also; but the rest of the party had not

yet arrived. They did so, however, almost immediately after, Lady Wrexham's merry ringing laugh heralding their approach. And then the plan of operations was arranged, and a guide, from among the many clamouring for acceptance, was selected. He was an old acquaintance of Lord Errington's, who, on a former occasion, had spent some weeks at Tivoli, exploring all its sylvan recesses. It was arranged that they should first descend by the winding paths into the glen below, while Giacomo, who was now regularly installed in Lord Errington's service, was to prepare an *al fresco* collation on the little terrace before the Sibyl's temple, leaving the circuit round the brow of the hill for the last excursion of the day.

To Lord Errington, the whole of the surrounding scenery was so familiar, that a

guide was unnecessary. And thus it happened that while the rest of the party resigned themselves to the tender mercies of Gasperino, and his never-ending dissertations on the manifold beauties of his native place—thus it happened that Lord Errington and Emily very soon found themselves wandering on in the undisturbed indulgence of one of the most perfect of earthly enjoyments; for how few of the pleasures of life can compare with the beauties of nature, enjoyed in companionship like theirs. Among the many sweet harmonies with which this bright world of ours is so richly and beneficently stored (let the sensualist or the misanthrope say what he will), not one is more striking or more beautiful than this—that it is precisely those pleasures which are the most innocent, that are at the

same time productive of the most exquisite and the most exalted happiness. The finest works of art may be, and often have been, degraded from their high purpose, into the interpreters of man's evil thoughts, or the stimulants to his worst passions; and even the most exalted son of genius may find the shrine at which he worships surrounded by the trials inseparable from everything human—its disappointments, its irritations, its over-wrought sensibilities. But the love of nature involves no such perils. We may gaze for ever on her fair face, certain of beholding there only images of purity and loveliness; we may listen for ever to the music of her voice, for its ever-changing harmonies, as they blend in one vast melodious hymn to the great Creator, speaking only the language of praise and adoration, and

cold must be that heart which can remain insensible to its soothing and sanctifying influences.

But Lord Errington and Emily Morton were none of these. As the most unsullied mirror will give back the brightest, purest images, so, to minds like theirs, the inspired poetry of nature will ever speak with double power and pathos ; and the perfect similarity of taste and feeling that existed between them, was, perhaps, one of the closest bonds which bound them to each other. And thus they wandered on, the past, with all its trials, forgotten in the elysium of the present, lingering now here, now there, as some point of peculiar beauty presented itself. And then, as fancy bore them unconsciously on into the future—to the English home, with its long perspective of tranquil happi-

ness, thoughts at last found words, and they spoke of that home and that future as of the realization of a dream, only the more bright and beautiful for the difficulties through which it would have been attained. Who can wonder that, with an horizon so steeped in light, the possible recurrence of clouds and darkness should be forgotten—naught remembered but the anticipation of that happiness, now, as it seemed to them, no longer doubtful or distant? As the return of spring would soon render the journey perfectly safe and easy, it had been arranged that they should quit Rome at the expiration of the Holy Week, and that the wedding should take place as soon after their arrival in England as possible.

When Lord Errington and Emily regained the Sibyl's temple, they found the

rest already there, and busily discussing the good things which Giacomo, with the skill of an *artiste*, had prepared for them. A very happy and pleasant party they were. Gasperino had proved himself a model *cicerone*, and not a single *contretemps* had occurred to mar the enjoyment of the day. But the longest half of the day's work was yet to be done, and meanwhile certain ominous dark clouds were gathering overhead.

“What do you say to those?” inquired Sir William, as he pointed them out to Lord Errington. Shall we find shelter for the ladies if the storm comes on?”

“Shelter we may find; but I scarcely know how the ladies can get back here; and the carriages cannot meet us, for there is only a mule-path great part of the way.

However, I think we shall have ample time before the storm comes — that is, if we start at once, and do not linger too long.”

And as everyone was of the same opinion, including Gasperino, and no one was disposed to abridge the pleasures of the day, they were soon again *en route*, the ladies on mules, for the present expedition was for them quite beyond the limits of a walk. As they skirted the summit of the mountain, and came in view of the great cascade, the sun once more shone out in all its brilliancy, and it was not till they had passed the Villa of Mæcenæ, with its picturesque arches and graceful cascades, that another dark cloud and a few drops of rain warned them to hurry on. Arrived at the Villa d’Este, not even the splendid prospect it commands, nor Emily’s entreaty to linger, could induce

Lord Errington to comply. After repeating his caution to the rest, he seized the bridle of her mule, and hurrying the animal on, they were enabled to reach the little inn near the ruin just in time to avoid the coming storm.

“We are not a moment too soon, dearest,” said Lord Errington, as he lifted her from her mule, and hurried her within, and almost as he spoke a thunder-crash burst immediately over their heads, that seemed to shake the building to its very foundation. Nothing could exceed the beauty and grandeur of the scene that now presented itself, as they watched anxiously from the window for the arrival of the rest of the party. Peal after peal was echoed and re-echoed from every mountain round, and flash succeeded flash, lighting up the

previous darkness with a momentary dazzling brilliancy that revealed every feature of the incomparable landscape. And then down came the rain, a perfect deluge, just as the party, to Emily's inexpressible relief, made their appearance. No accident, happily, had occurred, beyond what a good fire and a little patience could repair.

"They had only," as Lady Wrexham laughingly observed, "ended the day with a water party, as the most appropriate memento of the cascade of Tivoli."

But as the rain continued to fall pretty heavily, and the long drive home was thus robbed of half its enjoyment, it was a relief to all when the labours of the day closed with a sociable *réunion* in Mr. Morton's hospitable *salon* on the Corso.

“Ah, carina,” said Lady Wrexham, as they separated for the night, and she glanced from Emily’s uninjured dress at her own soiled and crumpled habiliments, “see what it is to have a *preux chevalier* to take care of you in this world of smiles and tears. There you are, looking as fresh and bright as if no disasters had happened to us.”

“All that’s bright *must* fade sooner or later, you know.”

“Heigh ho ! I suppose so ; but faded finery is so unbecoming, that I really must to bed, to hide my diminished head. Felicissima notte, carina — ‘Bright be thy dreams ;’” she lingered a moment, then added, in a tone of deep feeling that evidenced the truth of the aspiration, “and every reality still brighter.”

Long afterwards that short dialogue was remembered, together with the incidents of the whole day, its morning of sunshine, and its evening storm, emblems of the uncertainty of all human hopes and expectations.

CHAPTER XV.

“CÉLESTINE,” said Emily, as her maid, the following morning, was arranging her hair, “don’t forget to send the packet I gave you last night to Lord Errington.”

“Milord has got it, mademoiselle,” answered Célestine, tartly; and had Emily just then glanced at her mirror, she might have seen reflected there the smile of triumphant malice which accompanied the words.

"Giacomo came to know if you had taken cold yesterday, mademoiselle, and I gave him the parcel to take back."

"That was right"—and Emily relapsed into a very pleasant reverie, while Célestine completed her task.

The rest of the party were already assembled when she joined the breakfast table.

"You look pale this morning, dear," said Lady Wrexham, as she entered.

"I was very tired last night," answered Emily, "and so I mean to be lazy this morning, and send you all off to Frascati without me. I really have letters to write, and shall be glad of a quiet day."

"Ah, carina, I know what the letter-writing will be."

"No, indeed, dear; he stays at home on

purpose to write letters, too, and told me we should not see him till dinner-time."

"Well, carina, you do look tired, so get up your roses by the time we come back, and we can drive to Frascati another day."

When they had driven off, Emily sat down in her own room, to the enjoyment of a quiet morning; and after writing a long letter to Gertrude, and another to her cousin, Emmy Grenville, she threw herself back in her chair to rest, and indulge in one of those reveries so exquisitely enjoyable when the heart which has once known its own bitterness has learned to value the fullness of happiness like hers. Not a fear, not a doubt, was there to ruffle the wide ocean that, like a calm summer sea, lay stretched before her mental vision — all

was deep thankfulness for the past, and bright hope for the future. As she sat there in happy solitude, her cheek now once more tinged with the delicate hue of returning health, while a beaming smile played round her beautiful mouth, she was a model that many an artist would have gladly transferred to his canvas—a model of that inward “Peace which doth, indeed, pass all understanding.” She took no note of time, and thus the day wore on, till her meditations were at length broken by the entrance of Célestine, with two packets, one containing a letter from England, on which she at once recognized the hand-writing of Gertrude. The other was that she had sent to Lord Errington, and which contained some MSS. and sketches of her own, collected during her stay at

Naples. She put them aside, and with a cry of joy eagerly broke the seal of Gertrude's letter.

“PORTLAND PLACE, February 20.

“MY OWN DEAREST SISTER,

“A friend has offered to slip this into the ambassador's bag, and as my budget is likely to be very voluminous, for we all, including even Carry and Georgy, seem to have a great deal to say, I have chosen this instead of the usual post, particularly as it will, I hope, reach you even sooner. Dearest Emmy, could you but imagine how we have rejoiced over your dear letters, so like my own sweet sister's self once more. It was almost worth the pain and sorrow of the past, darling, to know you as you are now—and then the

future, so bright and sunny, without a single cloud, as it would seem. I am beginning to count the days till your return, which from your last I conclude cannot be now long delayed, for already spring seems coming even here.

“Do you know that Aunt Dorothy has a little plan in view, which, unenterprising as she generally is, will, I am sure, surprise you. It is that we should all meet at Brussels. And the cause of this wonderful effort?—so great, I might almost say so painful, to her, except that nothing which makes others happy can ever bring aught but pleasure to her dear kind heart. My own dear sister, supremely happy as you must be, I am going to make you still more so, by telling of my own bright prospects, well knowing how affectionately and truly you

will rejoice over them. How came it, dearest Emmy, that you told me so little about one, so much of whose time, I find (more, indeed, from dear little Carry's chattering than from himself), was spent in Portland Place when you were here. I can only think that your time and thoughts were so otherwise engaged that you had none to spare for him, and yet I fancy you must know him so well, that I have nothing left to tell but what I feel sure will rejoice my own Emmy's heart. He has been our daily visitor for the last month, but left town this morning to join Lady Emmeline at Brussels. I enclose you an affectionate letter I received from her a few days ago, which will explain the secret of my kind aunt's plans. Little did I think, dearest Emmy, when we were discussing

the momentous change in *your* future, how soon the same most important of all decisions would be referred to myself; but so it is, and, as I trust and believe, with an equally bright prospect of happiness."

The letter fell from Emily's hand. Tears—yes, blinding tears—rose to her eyes, and happy was it that she was alone—"alone with memory"—so sudden and startling was the intelligence that had just reached her. The human heart—ch, who can comprehend its mysteries? No mortal ken, assuredly. We may study human nature, and fancy ourselves adepts in the science as we will, but a complete knowledge of others never can be attained; for the human countenance itself, in its remarkable diversity, is not more varied than the features of the mind. Who then shall

dare to pass judgment on the actions—still less on the thoughts—when both are comprehensible to Omniscience alone?

Tears rose to Emily's eyes, brought there by a strange chaos of contending feelings, in which, however, assuredly neither regret nor sorrow had the smallest share. In spite of all that had passed, she still believed that Gertrude's prospects were, as she herself had said, bright and happy, and deeply she rejoiced to think so. A little strange it did seem on his part, for could she doubt his once affection for herself, and was the heart indeed of such transferable materials? But had not her own affections undergone a total change, and what wonder then that his should have done the same, still less wonder that they should at last have fixed themselves on that sweet sister

whose character she felt was so much better fitted to retain them than her own. How she now rejoiced at having withheld from Gertrude the history of those few sad months of trial—how she congratulated herself on having, as she supposed, so well concealed from him all he had made her suffer; and as Emily thought on all these things—of the painful past and the happy present—she dried her tears, and took up Gertrude's letter once more. Enclosed was Lady Emmeline's affectionate welcome to her son's betrothed. Old Lord Trentham had, it seemed, done a tardy act of brotherly kindness, by forestalling the settlement on his sister and her son, suggested in fact, though they knew it not, by Lord Errington himself; and this, together with good Aunt Dorothy's arrangement for Gertrude, would

provide amply for the young couple. Lady Emmeline, whose health now precluded all hope of a second visit to England, was desirous the marriage should take place at Brussels, and thus it was proposed that the whole party should meet there in the manner above alluded to. Mandeville, indeed, had in the beginning made some slight objections, but he had finally yielded to the wishes of his mother and his *fiancée*, and so it had been arranged.

We need not pause to analyze too curiously the various feelings which had led to the transfer of Mandeville's affections to the sister of her he had once undoubtedly so dearly loved. Few persons—few men particularly—are gifted with sufficient constancy to withstand desertion. A good deal of wounded pride there might have

been to loosen the chain that bound him, though enough of interest and affection remained to render the society of Emily's nearest and dearest peculiarly attractive. And thus the old habit of the daily visit to Portland Place was insensibly revived, and the result was one which might very naturally have been expected. It would, indeed, have been difficult for anyone thus thrown constantly into the society of a creature such as Gertrude Morton, to have been otherwise than attracted towards her; and perhaps the very difference between the sisters lent to the fascinations of Gertrude even an added charm. Very beautiful she was, with that calm, placid brow, and the dark hair simply braided; but it was a beauty altogether unlike that of Emily, with her sunny locks, her brightness and animation.

It was still early in the day. The party

would not for some hours be back from their excursion, and having added a few lines to Gertrude's letter, Emily once more threw herself back in all the luxury of happy thought. Her eye at length fell on the packet which had just been returned to her by Lord Errington. She remembered that it could not contain her own MSS. and sketches, for he could not have had time to look them over, so she took up the packet, and for a moment held it in her hand, while a beaming smile played over her features, for what that ever came from him but brought before her all that was bright and happy? She broke the seal. The first thing that met her eye was a letter addressed to herself, in the beloved and well-known hand. Lingeringly she opened it, certain beforehand of the words

of affection it would contain. An enclosure fell out. She gazed on it a moment in mute surprise, and then tore open Lord Errington's letter. With a blanched cheek and a straining eye, she read it through. The next moment, a dull sense of pain, a sinking of the heart, seemed creeping over her. She had just power to thrust the packet into the drawer of the writing-table before her; and when, half an hour later, Célestine made her appearance, she found Emily stretched on the floor, perfectly insensible.

“Ah, mon ami, you will trust to me for revenge the next time, I think,” mentally ejaculated the waiting-woman, as, after calling further aid, she assisted in placing Emily on her bed, and thus busied herself in the ungrateful task of recalling her to a miserable consciousness.

CHAPTER XVI.

“JE n’en sais rien, miledi,” was Célestine’s answer to Lady Wrexham’s anxious inquiry, when, some hours later, the party returned from Frascati, just in time to dress for dinner. I left mademoiselle quite well, reading some letter that had come, and when I returned, an hour afterward, I found her in a dead faint on the floor.”

“At what hour will Dr. Franklin return?”

“ At nine o'clock, miledi.”

Célestine had indeed sent for medical advice, for Emily's state was sufficiently alarming ; and she now lay in a deep sleep, the result of a composing draught which the physician had ordered for her.

Time passed on, and the dinner hour arrived, while Emily still slept. Lord Erington had not made his appearance, but as he had not been made aware of her illness, and it was known that he had purposely remained at home to write letters of importance, no particular notice was taken of his absence. Indeed, so entirely was everyone absorbed in Emily's sad and unaccountable attack, that little heed was paid to anything else. Of any sufficient cause for her illness, Célestine professed herself to be perfectly ignorant. Dr. Franklin him-

self seemed equally at a loss ; and though Emily, towards evening, sufficiently recovered to recognize those around her, all agitating questions were so strictly prohibited, and she seemed so disinclined for anything but perfect quiet, that her illness remained as much a mystery as ever.

To Lady Wrexham alone many vague and harassing fears suggested themselves ; but to communicate them to Mrs. Morton, undefined and shadowy as they were, she felt to be impossible. Dinner was over, when for the first time it seemed to occur to her that Lord Errington ought to be apprised of Emily's sudden illness, particularly as something unforeseen had evidently occurred to occasion his absence."

"I am certain he cannot know it, caro," said she to Sir William, "or he would have

been here long since. Do go and bring him. It seems so unkind—and for her, too.”

“Have you no clue to this sudden illness?” interrupted Sir William, as he took his hat to go to the Hôtel de l’Europe. “She seemed so well this morning.”

“No; I can in no way account for it. She herself has not spoken, and Célestine knows, or professes to know, nothing.”

Sir William went on his errand, and in ten minutes was back in the Corso. He brought the perplexing intelligence that Lord Errington had several hours previously quitted Rome, having given as a reason for his unexpected and sudden departure, that unforeseen circumstances necessitated his mediate return to England.

“Gone! and without a word,” exclaimed Lady Wrexham.

“What are you thinking of?” inquired Sir William, anxiously; “surely unforeseen business may have recalled him.”

“No, no, there is something wrong, depend on it. I must go to her, caro,” and she quitted the room, leaving Sir William, now that his suspicions had been thoroughly awakened, as anxious and perplexed as herself.

Of course the fact of Lord Errington's departure was made known to Mr. and Mrs. Morton, but, beyond a transient expression of surprise, they seemed too much absorbed in Emily's illness to dwell on anything else. Late at night, when Dr. Franklin's improved report had removed all present cause of uneasiness, Lady Wrexham, for reasons of her own, persuaded everyone, including Mrs. Mor-

ton, to retire to rest and leave her in charge of the invalid.

She had been at her post about an hour, and all was perfectly still, when she felt her hand clasped and heard a low whisper.

“Caroline, is that you? How kind!”

“Yes, dearest, but you must not talk.”

“Are we alone?”—in the same low whisper.

“Quite alone; I have sent them all to bed.”

“Oh, then, let me talk,” exclaimed Emily, raising herself. “I have been awake some time, but I could not speak before. No one would have understood me.”

“Well, darling, what is it?” said Lady Wrexham, perceiving that silence would be even more injurious than the unburdening of that sad, full heart. “What has happened?”

“Open my writing-table and read,” whispered Emily, as if the effort to speak were almost too painful.

Lady Wrexham rose and did as she was requested. The first thing that met her eye was Lord Errington’s envelope. It contained a letter from himself, and enclosed was another in Emily’s hand, *the* letter to Gertrude which only that very morning she had been so congratulating herself on never having sent to its destination. She looked further. There, too, was the missing journal, that record of thoughts and feelings, of suffering and self-reproach, of much that was unknown save to Emily’s own heart, the disappearance of which at the time of the robbery, it may be remembered, had caused her so much uneasiness.

In a moment the whole thing flashed on

Lady Wrexham's conviction — her worst surmises were confirmed. She silently approached the bed, from which Emily had been watching every movement, and without uttering a word stooped down and kissed her forehead.

“Have you read it? — his letter, I mean.”

“No, dearest, but I understand all.”

“Read it—and then—and then—” she spoke with considerable effort—“you will break it all to mamma—will you not?—I cannot—”

“I will do all you wish, dearest, except to give way to this utter despondency; but we will not talk of that now. You must take your composing medicine from me, and then, while you sleep, I will think over what is best to be done.”

As Lady Wrexham hoped and anticipated, sleep soon again brought oblivion to the sufferer ; and then, when at last assured that Emily was really unconscious, she sat down to examine the fatal papers, apparently the cause of all that had occurred. How they had come into Lord Errington's possession, she was wholly at a loss to imagine ; but that they had done so was evident, a fact confirmed by the contents of his own letter, which now lay before her :—

“ I return the papers you sent me this morning. By what unaccountable mistake you were led to do so, I am totally at a loss to conjecture ; except that, in this as in every event of our lives, we cannot fail to recognize the superintending hand that, in wisdom and mercy, from the merest trifles often deduces the most important results.

I will not pain you with regrets for the system of deception by which I have so long been blinded, since it should be rather a subject of congratulation to us both, that the discovery has been made ere it was too late. We are thus rescued from that most miserable of all states—a domestic hearth from which both affection and confidence are banished. I have read your letter to your sister. It explains much that was, till now, wholly incomprehensible—much, too, that of late, in the full confidence of your supposed affection, had entirely vanished from my remembrance. Your journal, with the exception of the first few pages, I return unopened. I had seen enough, and desire not to penetrate further into the secrets of a heart to which I resign all claim. I need scarcely say that from this moment you are

free. The world will, no doubt, attribute the rupture between us to any cause but the true one, and for many reasons it is far better it should be so. Of course, we meet no more. When this reaches you, I shall be already on my way to England; but only to make arrangements for quitting it again immediately, an intention to which I should not allude, but to assure you, on your return, against the chance of a meeting which must be equally painful and unwished for to both."

Long and painfully Lady Wrexham thought—then she took up Gertrude's letter and read it. It bore the same date as those first pages of the journal which Lord Errington alone had read. Ah! had he only continued the perusal, how changed would have been his impressions!—but it was vain to think

of that now. He had quitted Rome with convictions that, probably, never would be eradicated, even should the stern sense of right and wrong, which so eminently marked his character, permit the effort to be made. With a heavy sigh Lady Wrexham pursued her task, each page of the unlucky journal only serving to augment her sorrow for the past, and regret for the present.

“Ah, that my dear husband’s advice had been earlier followed,” she thought, as she closed the book at a passage breathing only the recovered hope and happiness of poor Emily’s later days, “how much misery might have been avoided.”

She had yet to learn the fact of Mandeville’s engagement to Gertrude—the climax to the tragedy of errors which had been enacting.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE following day Lady Wrexham took upon herself the ungracious task of making known to Mrs. Morton all that had occurred, together with the unexpected turn that events had now taken. It was a long, sad history, for concealment was no longer possible ; and now that all her hopes and projects had fallen to the ground, Mrs. Morton, for the first time, was awakened to the real

nature of the part she had so long been playing. What had been the result of all the efforts, the heartburnings, the anxieties of the past many months—nay, for years past ; for had not her whole life been one long struggle for that most unsatisfactory of all rewards—advancement in the heartless world of London life? And yet, to do her justice, it was for Emily, far more than for herself, that she now grieved. As she turned over the pages of that fatal journal, years of neglected childhood—neglected at least so far as the culture of the heart was concerned—years of untended girlhood, when a mother's care and a mother's sympathy had been so fearfully withheld, crushing all confidence, and exposing to a thousand nameless dangers—these all rose before her with bitter self-

reproach, only the more painful because now past recall. And thus it is often in life; errors may be acknowledged, repented, amended even, but their bitter fruits will often last till the latest hour of existence.

Could Lord Errington have been made aware of much regarding which he was, as we have seen, totally ignorant—could he but have read the whole history of that heart now so entirely his, it is scarcely to be doubted what the result would have been. On examining the papers which had, in a manner so unaccountable, been substituted for those which Emily had that morning sent him, it was found that many of the later pages of the journal, those particularly which, could he only have perused them, would so entirely have altered his

impressions, had been either removed or rendered nearly illegible. In what manner the papers had been restored remained a mystery perfectly unfathomable; and as the unfortunate result was now irremediable, it was deemed expedient to make no further inquiry on the subject.

One thing at least was evident—that it could only have been a refinement of malice that could have suggested, and finally have perfected, a scheme of such deep-laid and heartless villainy.

That a thousand rumours would go abroad regarding the sudden termination of Emily's engagement with Lord Errington, could not be doubted, but the greatest difficulty of all existed with respect to her own family.

How could they account to Gertrude—

how to Mandeville — for this unexpected rupture? Under existing circumstances, to do so by anything approaching the truth seemed impossible, and equally so that the whole party should meet, as proposed, at Brussels, for the celebration of Gertrude's marriage. But here Sir William Wrexham's clear judgment, and Caroline's kindness of heart, came to the rescue. That the engagement with Lord Errington was at an end could not be concealed; and it was at last decided that Mrs. Morton should write to Aunt Dorothy, informing her of the fact, and begging her to communicate it to Gertrude, with a request that no allusion whatever to a subject necessarily so painful might be permitted to cloud the happiness of their hoped-for speedy meeting. That Emily's health and spirits should, under the

circumstances, be rendered unfit for any festive scene was nothing extraordinary. It was therefore proposed that she should accompany Sir William and Lady Wrexham to Paris, while her parents proceeded to Brussels, whence it had already been arranged that Mandeville and his bride were to proceed on a lengthened tour towards the south, immediately after their marriage. These arrangements having once been decided on, but a few days sufficed to put them in execution. Rome, the scene of so much happiness and so much misery, was left behind; and after traversing Mount Cenis, and taking leave of her parents at Geneva, Emily Morton found herself, with her kind friends, rapidly advancing on the road to Paris and to England—that England to which she had long looked for-

ward with anticipations of such unclouded happiness.

“What should I have done without you, dearest Caroline,” she exclaimed, her eyes filling with tears, as they stood together on the balcony, the morning after their arrival in the Rue de Rivoli, gazing forth on those unrivalled gardens, now in all the beauty and verdure of summer.

“Hope on—hope ever, dearest,” said Lady Wrexham, kindly.

“Who knows what may happen yet?”

“No, Caroline, no,” exclaimed Emily; “I have forfeited what I valued even more than his affection—I have lost his good opinion, and that once gone, he will think of me no more. Do not mistake me, dear,” she continued, in that low, sad, sweet voice that was so infinitely touching, “I should

even love him less were it otherwise. Could I expect that he, who was all truth, would not condemn me?"

"Condemn you unheard?" interrupted Lady Wrexham. It was the first time she had spoken with anything like censure.

"Oh, hush—you forget—he did not know all. Perhaps, if he had—but it is vain to think of that now—let us not talk about it."

"Well, no; we will take a drive in the Bois de Boulogne, instead. The air will refresh you."

CHAPTER XVIII.

TIME passed on, wearily to some, cheerily to others—now like a laggard on his way, and leaving many a scar from the point of his scythe to mark his progress—now rushing onward all too swiftly, on wings bright and beautiful as those of the butterfly, and, alas! as fragile, too.

Six months were past. Mr. and Mrs. Mandeville, immediately on their marriage,

had wended their way towards the "sweet south," and after lingering awhile in Switzerland and the Tyrol, were now in Italy, Gertrude revelling in its many enjoyments with a zest which, under the circumstances, may well be imagined. Regarding the cause of the rupture with Lord Errington, Mrs. Morton had had no easy task to fulfil; but she had managed it so dexterously, that not a suspicion of the real truth ever seemed to enter the minds of any of the party assembled at Brussels, on the occasion of Gertrude's marriage. Anything that Mandeville knew on the subject, and it may be believed his inquiries were not many, was derived from Gertrude herself, and even she had adopted the impression that all had arisen from some misapprehension, or lovers' quarrel, and had jumped to the conclusion that

time would infallibly set all right between them. Perhaps, Mrs. Morton herself secretly cherished a similar opinion. Be that as it may, the impression was so exactly what she would most have wished to produce, that she thought it better to leave the matter as it was, with a request that, for the present, no reference to so painful a subject might be permitted to cloud the happiness of the moment.

The wedding had been a very quiet one, for the state of Lady Emmeline's health precluded the possibility of any display, even had anyone been disposed for it. The whole affair had, indeed, been so little known, and so little talked of, that when a paragraph in the *Morning Post* announced the marriage of "Edward Mandeville, Esq., nephew of the Earl of Trentham, to the

beautiful and accomplished daughter of Edward Morton, Esq., of Bentley Priory," people were rather at a loss to decide to what Miss Morton the said paragraph referred. Gertrude, whose life had been generally passed with Aunt Dorothy in the country, was comparatively little known to the gay, gossiping world of London. The period of Mandeville's very quiet courtship was that when every one was out of town, and now, coupled with the fact of the marriage, came rumours, spreading far and wide, of the ruptured engagement with Lord Errington. People looked wise, and shook their heads with a kind of "I could tell if I chose it" air, each giving his or her own version of the matter, and all of course as far from the truth as possible. Still, many trifles of the preceding season,

scarcely noted at the time, were now remembered and raked up, so that, what with the whole family being absent on the continent, what with the wedding being, as good-natured gossips said, hurried quietly over, the belief gradually gained ground that it was Emily Morton who, for some unaccountable reason, had been induced to relinquish the Countess's coronet, and to accept in its stead the less substantial, but perhaps to her more attractive, possession of the said coronet's fascinating cousin.

The thousand comments, conjectures, and inventions which finally led to the foregone conclusion may be well left to the imagination. Not a little envy had there been at Emily's previous good fortune ; not a little exultation was there now felt, if not expressed, at her supposed downfall ; but

greatest of all were the speculations indulged in, now that Lord Errington was once more free to choose a bride elsewhere. Volumes might be filled with the projects, the hopes, the visions with which half the lady mothers of London were agitated, on so momentous a subject. The moment, too, of Lord Errington's unexpected emancipation was peculiarly propitious, for it was just the commencement of the London season, and if (as some sagacious student of human nature has asserted) the heart is never so susceptible to tender impressions as when it has been recently lacerated by desertion or unkindness, who could tell what a little skilful management might effect?

But all such bright imaginings, like many other bright things, were doomed to disappointment, and great was the general dis-

may when it became publicly known, beyond the possibility of doubt, that Lord Errington had scarcely set his foot on English ground ere he had quitted it again, though what was his destination no one knew, or probably cared to know. It was manifestly a waste both of time and thought to bestow them upon one who, for the present at all events, was beyond the reach of the fair plotters against his peace.

CHAPTER XIX.

“Is the English mail not in?” inquired an English traveller, as he sat sipping his coffee in an apartment of the principal hotel at Cairo. The voice is a familiar one, though the speaker would perhaps be scarcely recognized as the same from whom we parted at Rome on a certain evening some two months ago. Lord Errington—for it was he—had, as we

have seen, started for England, on the memorable day succeeding that same happy evening ; but his stay there was only just of sufficient duration to enable him to make the necessary preparations for quitting it again immediately. Any very definite plan of travel he had none, beyond the determination to avoid the whole continent of Europe generally, and to plunge as much as possible into scenes hitherto untrodden. He had already passed a considerable time in Egypt and Palestine, but India was a country quite unknown to him, and one which seemed to promise so wide and interesting a field, that, on arriving at Gibraltar, he decided on proceeding thither by the overland route. With this intention, he started for Cairo, but had scarcely reached it, when he was

attacked by illness so severe that for some days recovery seemed doubtful; and but for the strength of a vigorous constitution, and the unremitting care of a faithful old servant, the companion of all his former wanderings in the East, it would have been indeed nearly hopeless. Fortunately the season was an unusually cool one; still, to attempt such an undertaking as that he had proposed was, in his present state, entirely out of the question; and on the morning above mentioned, the first on which for many weeks he had been able to quit his chamber, he had at length finally decided on abandoning his original intention, and passing the summer in cruising about the Mediterranean in the yacht which had brought him from England, touching from time to time at any of the Spanish or Italian ports on the coast.

Lord Errington was, as we have said, much changed since we last met him—not simply the change which severe illness would naturally produce, and which returning health and strength would as naturally restore. A close observer could scarcely fail to perceive that though the frame had suffered, it was the effect, and not the cause, and that beneath the cold grave exterior lay “that within which passeth show,”—wounds which time alone could heal, and the scars of which would probably be obliterated only with life itself. He was not a man of many words, and oh, well has it been said that “there is no grief like the grief which does not speak.”

Except to his father, to whom it was due to announce the change in his prospects, not a syllable on the subject uppermost in

his thoughts had passed his lips. Moments there were when the idea of his possibly too precipitate departure from Rome had crossed Lord Errington's mind, but they had been as instantly dismissed ; for who could doubt the evidence of trust betrayed and affections slighted, which in so mysterious, so providential a manner had been brought before him ? Thus time passed on, and the weary hours of sickness came, giving ample opportunity for reflection, oppressing its victim with a still deeper depression, yet but strengthening the resolution to persevere in the only course which a stern sense of right had first suggested.

It were vain to say that, struggle against them as he would, other and softer visions did not, however, at times present themselves

before him. Forgetfulness—alas ! there is no such word—would that there were ! Nor can the heart that has truly loved believe in the possibility of change, where the affections have been once worthily bestowed. Absence, distance, separation even, there may be, but till the object of such affection is proved unworthy of it—indifference—never !

Such were Lord Errington's reflections, as on the morning in question he sat lingering over his solitary breakfast. But then came the sequel. Had she not been proved unworthy ? Alas ! yes ; proved beyond a doubt ; and yet indifference came not—that sweet and speaking countenance, on which he had in fancy so often traced the expression of all that was best and holiest in woman, but too often presented itself be-

fore him. Lord Errington passed his hand across his brow, as if by so doing he could shut out some intensely painful remembrance; but in vain. The memories of other and happier days came thronging over him, and he was only roused from a long sad reverie by the entrance of his servant with a packet of letters and papers, together with a parcel of books he had ordered from England, for the mail had at length arrived.

It was a welcome relief, and Lord Errington, after turning over the numerous letters, selected one in his father's hand, and broke the seal. It soothed and gratified him, for the old earl, generally so cold both in words and manner, even to his son, wrote in a strain of unusual affection and kindness. All the rest were comparatively uninterest-

ing; and after glancing over them, Lord Erington took up the file of newspapers, and his attention was soon absorbed in their contents. There was very little astir in the political world just then. The gossip of fashionable life had no charms for him; and having exhausted every other topic likely to interest him, he laid down the papers, and was about to open the packet of books, when a paragraph in the last number of the *Morning Post* caught his eye.

It was the announcement of Mandeville's marriage, worded in the ambiguous manner we have already described:—

“Edward Mandeville, Esq., to the beautiful and accomplished Miss Morton,” &c.

Did his eyes deceive him? Could it be? No—it was no fiction of the imagination. There it was—undoubted—unmistak-

able. She was already the bride of another, within two short months from the evening when they had last parted in all the supposed confidence of mutual affection. Be it remembered that the announcement of Mandeville's engagement to her sister had reached Emily only on that last fatal morning, since which all communication between the families had ceased, and thus the idea of Gertrude never occurred to him. There was but one beautiful and accomplished Miss Morton present to his imagination, and, considering all things, it was natural enough to connect no other with the startling intelligence before him. He had never known how very dear she was to his heart till now; no, nor the full bitterness of feeling how utterly all the deep affections of that heart had been lavished in vain. One redeeming

point there was in the dark chronicle of the past. Self-reproach—that most bitter drop in the cup of misery—was spared him; and even the last act in the drama, his precipitate journey from Rome, which he had been sometimes tempted to regard as somewhat harsh and hasty, seemed perfectly justified by the result. Why then should one lingering regret remain for one so utterly heartless, so unworthy? A few moments there were of deep and bitter thought—one sigh to the memory of the past—and the dream was, or he fancied it was, for ever over.

“Domenico,” said Lord Errington, in a voice almost stern, so calm and cold was its expression, “have everything ready—I shall start to-morrow—I am going—I scarcely know where. It may be to the interior of Africa—will you accompany me?”

“Volontieri,” was the ready answer.

“Would that all were as faithful and true as that honest fellow,” was Lord Erington’s mental exclamation. “And now onward.”

“Look not mournfully into the past; it comes not back again. Wisely improve the present; it is thine. Go forth to meet the shadowy future without fear, and with a manly heart.”

CHAPTER XX.

WE must pass over an interval of two years—an age, if we regard it with reference to the future—a mere span in the past, though manifold were the changes brought by the hand of time, in many of the personages of our tale. Mr. and Mrs. Mandeville, after some months spent in Switzerland and the south of Europe, and a short visit to England, have taken up their residence permanently

at Brussels, in order to be near Lady Emmeline, to whom the society of her son and his sweet wife had now become almost a necessity. His love for his mother had been always one of the brightest traits in Mandeville's character, and now, after all his wanderings in the fields of fancy, he had settled down happily to the quiet of domestic life, thanks to the gentle influence which, rightly exercised, will rarely fail in fulfilling its most blessed mission. Oh, that woman would but remember how much of the happiness of home is ever in her keeping—how much of life's joys and sorrows, its good or its evil, may be traced to the impressions gathered through her influence within that magic circle. Man must go forth to the battle of life, to its strife and its toil, its dangers and its temptations, and

often perchance his spirit may weary, or his footsteps may wander by the way. But let woman ever cherish the remembrance that, in giving him the sunshine of a happy home to return to, she may weave round him a talisman which no evil can withstand, and rare, indeed, will be the instances where, sooner or later, its influence will be unfelt and unacknowledged.

Since the period of her marriage, the only drawback to Gertrude's perfect felicity had been the separation from her sister. They had met but seldom, and though a constant interchange of thought had been carried on by letter, still there seemed at times a restraint in Emily's writing, for which Gertrude found it difficult to account. She felt that the unre-served confidence of former years was

gone, for there was one subject that was unapproachable; and when, on occasion of a late visit to England, she had once or twice ventured to hint at the particulars of the rupture with Lord Errington, Emily had turned from it with such evident pain and embarrassment, that the attempt had not been repeated.

“Don’t let us talk about it, dearest Gertrude,” she had said; “there is so much that is painful to look back upon.”

“Forgive me, dearest Emily, but I cannot help thinking he was harsh and precipitate. A mere misunderstanding, as this seems to have been, for mamma has never yet told me all the particulars, should not surely have been so hastily acted on.”

“Perhaps not. And yet, no—” she added,

after a short pause, "he was right; I deserved it. But we will not talk about it; let me rather forget it—if I can."

But it seemed that the task of forgetfulness was not so easy as might have been desired under the circumstances. At the time when the above conversation took place, two years had passed away, and few people could have failed to notice the change in the once gay and admired Emily Morton. In the fashionable world she was, indeed, nearly forgotten; for, at her own earnest request, she had generally been absent from London, except at that season when she could not be called on to appear in its gay circles; and Mrs. Morton had yielded to Emily's wishes on the subject, influenced, perhaps, by some latent hope which still lingered, though scarcely acknowledged,

even to herself. Thus Emily had been permitted to pass the greater part of the two preceding seasons, either with Aunt Dorothy in the country, or at Rock Castle, with Sir William and Lady Wrexham; but time wore on, and even she herself was compelled to acknowledge the expediency of indulging no longer in the seclusion so congenial to her present tastes and feelings. Another season was about to commence, and she had just yielded an unwilling consent to appear once more on the stage of London life, when Lady Wrexham proposed an excursion to Germany and the Tyrol, and seconded so warmly Emily's wish to accompany her, that permission was at length accorded.

“It will do her more good than London, depend upon it,” said Lady Wrexham,

whose kind heart had in fact originated the project chiefly on Emily's account.

"I hope so," said Mrs. Morton; "but I should have preferred her being in town. It is time she should forget this business, and go out a little. There is no use in wasting time and thoughts on a shadow, and, besides, it makes her look so ill."

"Dear aunt, I think Emily more beautiful than ever; and so would most people, I am sure. However, if you really wish to bring back her roses, the Tyrol will do it better than London, I am certain—so do lend her to me this once."

"Well, for this once, Caroline; but really she must not go on shutting herself up for ever. Sir Charles Towneley, you know, has brought a particular introduction to us, and I so much wish her to meet him; and

then the Prince of L—— is coming over, and attention from royalty always gives *éclat* to a girl, you know.”

Lady Wrexham sighed. It was evident the old leaven was not quite extinguished yet. Nevertheless, the permission was given, and the penance of one more London season was avoided.

It was on a beautiful evening, towards the close of July, that the travelling carriage of Sir William Wrexham drove up to the little inn at Mittewald, in the heart of the Tyrol. Every one who has once made it his resting-place will scarcely fail to repeat the visit—at least if it still is, as it was then, an epitome of everything that is comfortable and refreshing both to body and mind. The place is a mere hamlet, and the little inn above mentioned

is as primitive as anything can well be, that is intended as a shelter for travellers of a superior class ; but as Emily sat by the lattice window of her sleeping-room, and looked forth on the forest of dark firs, rising to the very summit of the hills at the foot of which the village lies nestled, and listened to the music of the trout stream, as it brawled beneath her window, it was with a sense of quiet enjoyment to which she had long been a stranger.

After making her preparations for retiring to rest, she dismissed Lady Wrexham's maid (Mademoiselle Célestine had long since betaken herself to some more congenial post), and throwing a shawl round her, she extinguished her candle, and sat down by the open window to enjoy the exceeding beauty of the night.

Not a sound was heard in the little hamlet, for the Tyrolese are an early people, and Emily's vigil was a solitary one. At last the stillness became almost oppressive, and closing her window, she prepared to seek her pillow, when the sound of distant carriage wheels caught her ear. They approached nearer and nearer, and at last stopped before the door. Then came a demand for admittance, tardily answered, for the whole household had retired to rest. Then the sound of footsteps on the stairs, followed by the ushering in of the new comer, or comers, into the apartment adjoining that which Emily occupied. Foreign partitions are not calculated to ensure much secrecy, and thus not only the voice, but the words spoken, in the next room were distinctly audible.

“At what hour did the Herr require his horses in the morning?”

“I shall probably remain here to-morrow,” was the answer.

“My servant met an accident on the road, which detained us so late. Where is the nearest doctor to be found, if we should want one?”

The required information was given—the door was closed, and the traveller was left to his repose.

Not so Emily Morton. The first words that had reached her ear had caused her to start up and listen attentively; the next convinced her she was not mistaken—that voice was only too familiar. She lay down to rest, but not to sleep, and Lady Wrexham's first exclamation, when they met early the next morning, was—

“Why, carina, how pale you look!—what is the matter? You must have been up all night, I am sure.”

“Not exactly that; but I have not slept well, dear. The morning air will do me good. At what hour do you propose to start?”

“The moment we have swallowed our breakfast.”

“Suppose, when we are ready, that you and I walk on, and leave Sir William with the carriage to pick us up.”

“Volontieri.”

“I am afraid those people who came in so late disturbed you, carina,” said Lady Wrexham, when they had walked on for about a quarter of an hour in silence.

“Yes.”

There was something in the tone in which

this one monosyllable was uttered that caused Lady Wrexham to look up.

“You are out of spirits to-day, dear,” said she, kindly. “What is the matter?”

“You would think me so foolish if I told you. Do you know *who* it was who arrived last night, Caroline?”

Lady Wrexham stopped suddenly, and gazed earnestly in Emily’s pale and agitated countenance.

“Surely you do not mean—but no—you must be mistaken. I happen to know he was in Circassia ten days ago.”

“He was in the room next to mine last night; I could not mistake the voice.”

“And you hurried away in that manner, when I have been so long hoping and wishing you might meet,” exclaimed Lady Wrexham, unguardedly.

“Meet him, Caroline? I would not have met him for twenty worlds.”

“And why not, dearest?”

“Oh, Caroline—*can* you ask?”

“Well, it is very strange,” said Lady Wrexham, “and to have met thus at a little Tyrolese inn. He is probably on his way to England.”

“Why do you think so?” said Emily, with an interest she could not conceal.

“When we were at Frankfort, Sir William saw in the papers that Lord Trentham had been dangerously ill, and that his son, who was then in Circassia, had been written for. I thought it better not to tell you then, but there is no use in not doing so now.”

At that moment the carriage overtook them. Sir William seemed as little disposed to talk as his companions; and it

was not till he and Lady Wrexham were alone, towards evening, that she found he too had been aware of Lord Errington's being under the same roof with themselves the preceding night.

"His father has been very ill, but is better, and he therefore remains at Mittelewald to-day."

"Then you saw him?"

"For a few minutes only. He was standing at the door when I came down to get into the carriage."

"Do you think he knew Emily was with us?"

"I cannot tell. The only question he asked was for yourself, and as to our route, which happens to be exactly in the opposite direction to his own, and perhaps it is as well."

“Possibly,” said Lady Wrexham, with a sigh, “che sarà, sarà; yet I cannot help sometimes wishing that some good fairy would set things right between them.”

“We must wait, Caroline, and leave it to One who orders everything for us, far better than we can for ourselves.”

“True, caro, you are right, as you always are.”

CHAPTER XXI.

THE winter was passed in comparative seclusion at Bentley. The season was unusually severe, multiplying the sufferings of the poor, and the duties of the rich, and opening to Emily Morton a rich mine of tranquil enjoyment, such as she had never before experienced. Blessing and blessed, every face in the little village of Bentley dressed itself in smiles to meet her; while the daily

exercise of the sweetest of all duties, that of ministering to the wants of others, brought back the bloom to her cheek, and the sunshine to her heart;—never had she looked so lovely, or felt so tranquilly happy as now. The pomps and vanities of the great world had never really harmonized with her tastes or feelings; and it was thus, with intense regret, that, in compliance with her mother's wishes, she found herself compelled, on the approach of spring, to relinquish her present more congenial mode of life, and prepare for the toil and bustle of another season in London.

Easter fell early this year, and thus the beginning of March found the Morton family once more domiciliated in Portland Place. Sir William and Lady Wrexham, as well as the Grenvilles, were already arrived, and

the London world was gradually resuming its look of animation. The only drawback to the multiplied dreams and projects floating through Mrs. Morton's brain consisted in the somewhat anxious intelligence which, from time to time, reached her from Brussels.

Gertrude's health, though without any apparent cause, was evidently giving way, and the tone of her letters, in spite of their assumed cheerfulness, was such as to bring to Emily many an anxious thought. A fortnight, however, had now elapsed without any intelligence; and the return of spring, that most hopeful of seasons, seemed for the moment to have banished entirely all apprehensions of a dark nature.

Of Lord Errington's movements everyone seemed equally ignorant. The old

earl, after lingering for a few weeks subsequent to his son's return, had at length paid the debt of nature ; but scarcely had the added honours and increased importance of his successor been made public, than the intelligence spread far and wide, of his departure once more on his travels, and as anything like pursuit seemed fruitless, it was deemed best to let him follow his own vagaries, and seek for more attainable quarry elsewhere.

“ Can I have the carriage directly after breakfast, mamma ? ” inquired Emily, one lovely morning at the beginning of April. “ I have promised to take Mademoiselle Colbert to see her brother's pictures, and she can only get away for an hour quite early.”

The inquiry related to the sister of a

young French artist, in whose history and success they had become much interested when at Rome. The young artist's pictures were now to be exhibited for the first time in London, where his sister, through the kindness of Lady Wrexham, had obtained a situation as companion, that she might afford him the means of existence where his talents were most likely to meet with patronage.

The exhibition that day was a private one, and at the early hour when Emily and her friend entered, the rooms were comparatively empty.

"I hope to bring you again, Agnese," said Emily kindly ; "but as our time is limited this morning, we will only look at that which most interests us both. In which room are your brother's pictures? I

think you said he was tolerably well satisfied with the way in which they had been hung."

"Much better than, as a stranger, he had any right to expect," said Agnese.

"And which are his favourite pictures?"

"Ah, that I can hardly tell you. You know I have not been with him of late, and he is always so anxious that even my judgment should not be biassed, he will rarely tell me anything; but I do know there was one portrait in which he took an especial interest, for it is that of his best and kindest friend. It was painted last winter in Rome."

"Which is that?"

"No. 361. I see it is in the last room—the only one of his there, indeed."

The two girls passed on, dwelling on each picture in succession—Agnese happy, gratified, hopeful—Emily, her sweet face borrowing an added charm from the consciousness of happiness given to another.

“We are like children, keeping the best for the last,” said she, smiling, as they hurried on towards No. 361, simply noted as “A Gentleman in a Greek Dress.”

The rooms were now filling. A group of persons was before the picture, concealing it from those beyond, and criticising the *chef-d'œuvre* of the painter; and as Emily listened to their encomiums, she good-naturedly made way for Agnese, who, with glad tears in her eyes, was eagerly striving to obtain a glimpse of the object of their remarks.

At last they both stood before it. What

was it that sent the eloquent blood rushing to Emily's cheek, then back to the heart, leaving her pale and motionless as a statue? What was it that made her almost convulsively grasp the rail before her for support?

"Is it not beautiful?" murmured Agnese, too much absorbed to notice Emily's agitation, and for several minutes she continued in silence, scanning all the manifold perfections of that dear brother's pencil, much as a fond mother gazes on her child.

"And so like," whispered Emily, scarcely knowing what she said, yet feeling the absolute necessity of saying something.

"Like? You know him, then?"

"I knew him once," said Emily, with effort.

"Ah," pursued Agnese, scarcely noticing her words, so engrossed was she in the con-

templation of the picture, “you would not wonder that I look with such interest on this picture, if you knew all that Auguste has told me of the original—how good and kind when all our own deserted us. You see there is no particular beauty of feature—it is the expression that gives it such a charm. But you are ill,” she exclaimed, as, looking up, she became suddenly aware of the extreme paleness of Emily’s countenance. “How selfish I am; the heat has overpowered you; let us go at once;” and placing Emily’s arm within her own, they turned to move away.

“It is nothing,” said Emily, by a strong effort mastering her emotion. “You know I have never been very strong since my illness.”

They passed on, and, not without diffi-

culty, were making their way through the rooms, when again Emily's composure was destined to be disturbed. In passing through one of the crowded doorways, there was a momentary pause, and Emily felt her arm pressed by her companion.

"Dear Miss Morton," whispered Agnese, "just look. Surely that is my dear brother's kind friend—there—near the lady in the blue bonnet. The difference of dress cannot disguise him. Oh, how I wish I knew him! How much gratitude have I to express!"

Involuntarily Emily looked in the direction pointed out. Their eyes met; or she fancied so. It was but for a moment, for hers fell as instantly. Was it fancy—or had there been a slight, cold, proud inclination of the head?—or had he made as though he saw her not?

Oh, the unimaginable bitterness of meeting thus, in a crowd, as strangers, without a word, a thought exchanged !

The next moment he had vanished ; and passing on, at the foot of the stairs they encountered Sir William and Lady Wrexham, who had just entered.

“ Away so soon, carina ? ”

“ Mademoiselle Colbert must be back early,” replied Emily, faintly.

One glance told Lady Wrexham something was amiss.

“ I will call in the course of the morning,” said she, pressing Emily’s hand, but without further remark.

CHAPTER XXII.

LADY WREXHAM mounted the stairs, and made her way as best she could through the crowd with which the rooms were now thronged. Her visit to the gallery, like that of Emily, had been only one of interest on the young artist's account, and she had now an additional reason for postponing any further inspection to another day. Emily's pale cheek and agitated manner

told its own tale, and Lady Wrexham's kind heart was yearning to hear, and, if possible, soothe, whatever new cause of agitation had arisen. She and Sir William therefore passed on as quickly as the crowded state of the rooms would admit, and they had already reached the last, where the unknown "Gentleman in a Greek Dress" was, as before, surrounded by a group of admiring critics, when her eye caught the figure of the young artist himself. He turned, and, with a glad smile, acknowledged her salutation, and at the same moment a gentleman, by whom he was accompanied, turned his head, and Lady Wrexham, to her surprise, recognized Lord Errington, or, as we must henceforth call him, the Earl of Trentham. To avoid the meeting, without absolute discourtesy,

was impossible, even had it been practicable for Lord Trentham in the crowded state of the room to make his escape. Always a creature of impulse, Lady Wrexham held out her hand with the warm impulse of other days; and while M. Colbert, unconscious of the part he was playing, listened, with the happy smile of a first great success, to Sir William's congratulations, Lord Trentham had no chance but to submit as best he might to the awkward position in which he so unexpectedly found himself.

The rapidity of thought has become a proverb, never more truly exemplified than in the brain of Lady Wrexham during the one second of time which succeeded to her first surprise. That Lord Trentham was greatly changed since they had last met,

was the first of her impressions. There was a graver, a more thoughtful, perhaps a sadder expression than of old, while here and there a few silver hairs were just beginning to be discernible; and as Lady Wrexham noted all this, the condemnation she had once been disposed to attach to his conduct gave place to a more kindly feeling. Then rose before her Emily's pale cheek, as she had just seen it, and the memory of all that pure and gentle being had been made to suffer. Lady Wrexham's heart was beating very fast, but it was a brave little heart, too—brave in its consciousness of right, brave in its deep affection for and desire to promote the happiness of those it loved.

“Have you been long in England? You have been a sad truant of late,”

she said to Lord Trentham, who, after the first salutation, had not uttered a single word.

“I returned only last night.”

“Did you come by way of Brussels?” inquired Lady Wrexham again, her courage rising as she proceeded.

“Yes, I did”—in the same cold short manner as before.

“Then probably you saw Lady Emmeline,” pursued Lady Wrexham resolutely, and assuming, as a matter of course, that Lord Trentham was acquainted with the concerns of his relatives. “No doubt you can tell me something of Mrs. Mandeville. We have not heard for a fortnight, and are seriously uneasy concerning her.

“I was only at Brussels one night, and was unable to see Lady Emmeline,” replied

Lord Trentham, in a tone again so cold as to be almost freezing ; but the next moment he added, "I was not aware that Mrs. Mandeville had been ill."

"She has been ill for months," observed Lady Wrexham, warmly, for she was provoked at his apparent indifference, "and the last accounts were anything but satisfactory."

No answer. There was an awkward pause, and even Lady Wrexham's self-possession was beginning to be at fault.

"I believe I must wish you good morning," said Lord Trentham at last, "for my time is limited, as I leave town again the day after to-morrow."

"Where may I be permitted to pay my respects?" inquired the young artist of Lady Wrexham, as they were moving away.

“We are still in Bruton Street,” she replied, and the next moment both were lost in the crowd.

“All men are pretty much alike,” was Lady Wrexham’s petulant reflection, as she drove along to Portland Place. “After all, he is not worthy of our sweet Emily, or he never could have spoken with such heartlessness. What has poor Gertrude done, that he should be so indifferent about her?”

“Ill, and at Brussels? Strange—most strange,” thought Lord Trentham, as, after parting from his companion, he entered his own silent, solitary mansion, in St. James’s Square.

“I must have been mistaken then. The cheek was paler, certainly—still, could there be another like *her*?”—and a sigh escaped

him. "And after all, what matters it? Absent or present, is she not the wife of another? And even were it otherwise—what then?"—and as he pursued the train of thought, his brow resumed once more its cold stern expression.

"Dear Caroline, I wish mamma had not insisted on my coming to town," said Emily. "Just fancy the torture of never going out without the risk of meeting him."

"No fear, dear; he leaves town the day after to-morrow;" and Lady Wrexham, whose returning interest in Lord Trentham had received a sudden check from his own coldness of manner, secretly rejoiced in the hope of being able at last to divert Emily's thoughts into some more profitable channel. But, oh! wayward heart, now that the chance of meeting was annihilated, she was think-

ing of his departure with regret instead of self-gratulation.

“My aunt must lend you to me for a few days, *carina*; you shall come with me to Bruton Street,” said Lady Wrexham, kindly, for she felt how welcome at that moment would be the charge,—and Emily went.

It was the day that Lord Trentham had fixed for his departure from London. The morning’s post had brought a letter for Emily, which had been forwarded from Portland Place, announcing that Gertrude had indeed been very ill, but was now pronounced out of danger. Immediately after breakfast, Lady Wrexham had gone to Mrs. Grenville’s to communicate the intelligence, leaving Emily in the drawing-room in Bruton Street alone. There was a knock at the door.

“Is Lady Wrexham at home?”

“Not at home,”

The visitor lingered a moment.

“Was Lady Wrexham soon expected home?”

“Did not know—her ladyship might return at any moment. Was only gone to Mrs. Grenville’s, with a letter received that morning from Brussels about Mrs. Mandeville. Would the visitor walk in and wait a bit?”

There was a moment’s hesitation, a longing desire to hear more, a little self-reproach, and then he was ascending the stairs—the drawing-room door was thrown open—the name was given—

“Lord Trentham.”

The door closed—and there they stood, once more face to face—he, outwardly calm,

cold, composed—she, trembling in every limb, as, having risen from her seat, the unexpected apparition appeared before her—

“Emily!”

He perceived she was unable to speak, indeed scarcely able to support herself. A sudden light was bursting on him—his arm was round her.

“Emily! *can* this be real?—or do I dream? Will you not speak to me?” he exclaimed, passionately. “Tell me that it is no delusion, that you are still, as ever, mine, mine only.”

Her head sank upon his shoulder—no sound escaped her lips; but the hand clasped in his told more than words.

In the unimaginable happiness of that one brief moment, all that both had suffered was forgotten.

“Lord Trentham is upstairs, my lady.”

“Is Miss Morton in the drawing-room?”
inquired Lady Wrexham, in a tone of marvellous composure.

“Yes, my lady.”

Lady Wrexham quietly passed the drawing-room door, and went on to her own room.

“I thought you intended leaving town to-day,” said she to Lord Trentham, about an hour later, with one of her own old saucy smiles. “If you can be tempted to stay, however, suppose you come and dine with us, at half-past seven, instead.”

“If I may.”

He did come; and it was a very happy evening.

CHAPTER XXIII.

GERTRUDE to Emily :—

“ Till to-day, I have been too weak to write my own dear sister ; but your dear letter seems to have given me new life. I can scarcely hope, for some time, to be strong enough to undertake the journey to England, still less to encounter the excitement in which, of course, I should find you all. We must therefore hope to meet later,

dearest Emily, when the knowledge of your happiness, more than anything the doctors can do for me, will have better enabled me to enjoy it as it deserves. When I *can* move, we are to go to Switzerland for total change, and a more bracing air; dear Lady Emmeline to accompany us, for she will not let me go alone, she says."

Yes, it was too true. Gertrude's health had been for some months evidently failing, though without any apparent cause, till at length, borne down by some invisible agency, an alarming illness had supervened. Surrounded, as she was, by everything that heart could desire, it seemed as impossible to trace the cause of her suffering to any moral as to any physical source. And Man-deville, there was a change, too, in him, as sad as it was inexplicable. They had passed

the preceding summer in wandering about, and had started with the usual anticipation of enjoyment. At the moment of setting out, Gertrude's maid had been compelled to leave her, and they had considered themselves fortunate in encountering Célestine and her husband, Giacomo, both whose services were instantly secured. What was the spell which seemed to darken the fate of all who came in contact with the subtle Frenchwoman, none ever knew. From that period an unwonted depression of spirits crept over Gertrude's whole being, which every effort of her own failed to conceal, while Mandeville, on his side, became first anxious, then restless and distrustful—till, at last, it was but too evident that a serpent had entered into their Eden, with noisome breath withering its flowers.

And thus time went on. They returned to Brussels. Célestine and her husband betook themselves elsewhere, and Gertrude, after vainly struggling for some months, at length gave way, as we have seen.

What was the sad and mysterious influence which wrought so fatal a change in the once happy home, none ever knew. Suffice it to say, that the intelligence of Emily's approaching happiness seemed first to bring back a partial glow to Gertrude's cheek and a light to her eye, but many years had passed during which not only the happiness of their wedded life, but even their intercourse with Lord and Lady Trentham, seemed darkened by some inexplicable cloud, ere the error of Mandeville's early days would appear to have been sufficiently expiated, and unalloyed

peace, confidence, and affection were restored to their fireside.

Little remains to be told. Blanche and Charles Grenville were very happy, two sunbeams diffusing joy and gladness wherever they went, unlike Sir Henry and Lady Charlton, for poor Miss Polly only too soon discovered that she would have to expiate with the sorrows and regret of a whole life the one error into which her own folly and her husband's wickedness had precipitated her.

For Lord Trentham and his fair Emily, after all their many trials, a happier fate was reserved. Mrs. Morton's vanity was at length gratified with a splendid wedding at St. George's, Hanover Square, and with the subsequent announcement in the *Morning Post*, that the Earl and Countess of

Trentham had departed to spend the honeymoon at his lordship's magnificent seat, Trentham Abbey. There were many of their future days destined to be passed. They both knew too well the fallacies of the great world to seek in its pleasures that felicity which the charms of a happy home are alone capable of affording. Gifted in an eminent degree with the glorious privilege of ministering to the wants of others, regarding the advantages of rank and fortune only as talents committed to their keeping by Him to whom one day they must render an account of all, they went on their way, blessing and blest.

Storms, indeed, there were, for the fairest lot is not without them; but every trial seemed but a link to bind them more

closely to each other. Sharing every thought, every joy, and every sorrow, mutually sustaining and sustained, happy in each other, and in the Eden created by their own useful exertions all around them, the memory of the good Earl and Countess of Trentham will ever be embalmed with reverence and affection in the hearts of their dependants, and will descend as a heritage to their children, more precious than gold or silver.

THE END.

YUGRA

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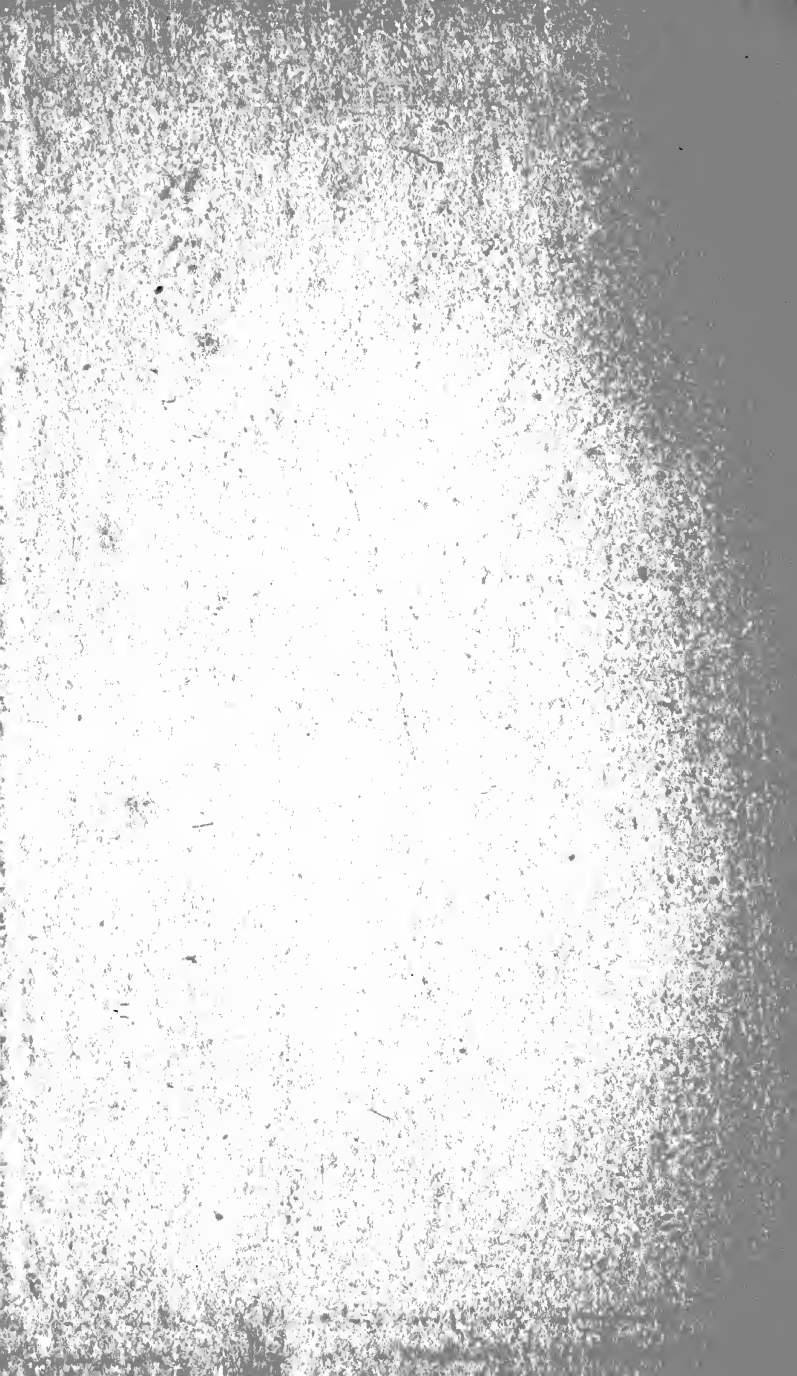
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